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Schelling and Levinas on Theodicy and the “Life” of Evil¹

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In evil's appearing, in its original phenomenality, in its quality, there is announced a modality, a manner: the not-finding-a-place ... a counter-nature, a monstrosity, the of-itself disturbing and alien. And in this sense, transcendence!

—Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Evil” (Postface)²

To begin, let us recall the two paths that Schelling identifies in 1809 as alone able to give us a non-reductive elucidation of evil: dualism and kabbalism. He writes:

To demonstrate that there are but two means for explaining evil—the dualistic, according to which an evil ground-being with modifications supposed as much beneath as beside the good; and the Kabbalistic, according to which evil is explained through emanation or contraction, and that thereby every other system must sublimate evil—[to

¹ An earlier version of this paper appeared in *Science et esprit* 70, no. 3 (2018): 303–315 (Dominican University College, Ottawa, Ontario).

² Emmanuel Levinas, foreword to *Job and the Excess of Evil*, by Phillippe Nemo, trans. Michael Kigel (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 173.

demonstrate this] would require nothing less than the entire power of a ... fundamentally expanded philosophy.³

The dualist path, setting good and evil either in a vertical (*unter*) or a lateral relation to each other, and the kabbalistic or ecstatic-instatic path, to which Schelling adds surreptitiously the neo-Platonic terms “emanation” and “distance”—these are the sole approaches liable to do justice to the reality of evil.

Now, given the formalism Schelling denounced in what he calls Spinoza’s “realism,” and given the abstractness of Leibniz’s theodicy (SW VII: 356);⁴ indeed, given the formalist assumption of an absolute knowledge that crosses through and guides Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Schelling drops the foregoing remark, toward the end of his *Inquiries*, like an avowal or a justification. Arguably, Schelling is less dualistic than biune and processual. Indeed, the ultimate unification of his two originary principles in the *Ungrund* seems more speculative still than the original birth of intelligibility, *das Wort*, out of the two fundamental principles themselves. As we know, Schelling is indebted to the Christian kabbalism he learned from seventeenth-century mystic Jakob Böhme (1572–1624). But he is clear: to provide an account of the reality of evil able to rival or to parallel Kabbalism “would require nothing less than the entire power of a fundamentally expanded philosophy.” This is because, beginning with the Greeks, evil was conceived *eo ipso*, in privative rather than living or substantive terms.

Schelling’s quest for a *gründlich ausgebildete* philosophy unfolded over three decades, during which the changes he introduced to his terminology arguably all strove to reach a positive philosophy that would be beyond criticism and dialectics. We see one germinal line of this worked out in the 1809 *Inquiries into Human Freedom*. I apologize to the Schellingians here for what will be a somewhat superficial discussion of the *Inquiries*. I proposed to present

³ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutmann (La Salle, IL: Open Court, [1936] 1986), 91; in German, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Cotta’scher Verlag, 1861), 360. Hereafter, page numbers are from the SW, included in the English translation, abbreviated as PINH.

The original reads: “So um zu beweisen, daß es nur zwei Erklärungsarten des Bösen gebe—die dualistische, nach welcher ein böses Grundwesen, gleichviel mit welchen Modifikationen unter oder neben dem guten, angenommen wird, und die kabbalistische, nach welcher das Böse durch Emanation und Entfernung erklärt wird—und daß deshalb jedes andere System den Unterschied von Gut und Böse aufheben müsse ... würde nichts weniger als die ganze Macht einer ... gründlich ausgebildeten Philosophie erfordern.”

⁴ Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries*, 31.

⁵ “... [E]s muß vor allem Grund und vor allem Existierendem, also überhaupt vor aller Dualität, ein Wesen sein; wie können wir es anders nennen als den Urgrund oder vielmehr *Ungrund*?” (SW VII: 406; PINH: 87).

on Schelling and Levinas, and so I will discuss the surprising impact of the first on the second. Let me first review the meaning of evil in the birth of intelligibility out of the conjoined but disparate first principles in the *Inquiries*.

In the context of the debate over Spinozism, Schelling echoes Jacobi's conviction that the Spinoza-reception had reified human freedom, and the proposition that all things are in God, into a higher-order mechanics—but that the actual *intent* of Spinozism could be recovered through a finer understanding of participation and predication, whose logic focused on the relationship between the antecedent and the consequent (SW VII: 342; PINH: 14): “[I]f, for example, [a] proposition is advanced that the Perfect is the Imperfect, it signifies: the Imperfect exists not by means of those attributes in and through which it is Imperfect, but by means of the perfection which it contains” (SW VII: 341; PINH: 13). Schelling argues further: “The profound logic of the Ancients distinguished subject and predicate as the antecedent and the consequent ... and thus expressed the real meaning of the law of identity [of beings and God, beings in God]. Even a tautological statement,” he adds, “if it is not to be altogether meaningless, retains this relationship” (SW VII: 34; PINH: 14). In short, that there might be freedom *and* evil “in God” need neither vitiate evil nor deny freedom as such.

Manfred Frank has reminded us that Schelling here returns to the logic of identity he learned from Gottfried Ploucquet, namely that every being contains within it something ostensibly other than it, which indeed it may become. That is, an A, conceived within this dynamic and modalizing logic, is both itself and what it may become: Aa and Ab. In other words, A^o or A in its “originary state” contains *not so much a* and *b* qua predicates but qua modes by which A raises itself in its becoming to a higher power of itself, or A². This resurrection of a logic known to Leibniz but abandoned after Wolff⁶ admits more than the two aforementioned modalizations; there might be an infinity of them. In this respect, to understand nature, or freedom, as “in” God does not mean to localize them in God like qualities or predicates—so much as to understand that through some power of God, they have their being.⁷ Properly

⁶ See Manfred Frank, “‘Identity of Identity and Non-identity’: Schelling’s Path to the ‘Absolute System of Identity,’” in *Interpreting Schelling*, ed. Lara Ostarič (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 130. Frank writes: “If one wishes to compare this conception with the Kantian one, predication is precisely a relative identification, just as being [*Sein*] is an absolute one. By bringing together Kant’s famous thesis about being and the identity conception of predication, there emerges the conception peculiar to Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schelling, according to which the essence of absolute identity presupposes a ground that rejects all consciousness.”

⁷ “If we let infinite Substance = A, and infinite Substance regarded in one of its consequences = A/a; then that which is positive in A/a is indeed A. But it does not follow on this account that A/a = A, i.e., that infinite Substance regarded in its consequences is to be considered exactly the same as infinite Substance as such. Or ... it does not follow that A/a is

understood, Spinoza's God should neither deny freedom (SW VII: 345; PINH: 18), nor should Spinoza's pantheism sublimate individuality. In order that both freedom and individuation be preserved, however, Spinoza's God had to be explicitly set forth as living, since what is not living could not admit such modalizations. A living God, then, is primordial being, and "Will is primordial Being" (SW VII: 350; PINH: 24). As we know, rather than a lifeless pantheism, then, Schelling executes his "pistol-shot" birth of the absolute by offering a "narrative" of the emergence of God from God's self.

Werner Marx has urged that we consider Schelling's "God" as essentially the universe and, we might add, as "what-is."⁸ That "God" be living, then, requires that God be born, which in turn invites us to conceive of something in God that both is and is not God (SW VII: 359; PINH: 34). Recurring to Ploucquet's logic of *reduplicatio*, Schelling identifies this in 1809 as God's *Basis*. He writes:

As there is nothing before or outside of God, he must contain within himself the ground of his existence. All philosophies say this, but they speak of this ground as a mere concept without making it something real and actual [*etwas Reellem und Wirklichem*]. This ground of his existence, which God contains, is not God viewed as absolute, that is, insofar as he exists. For it is only the *Basis* of his existence, He is *nature* [*der Grund seiner Existenz; Er ist die Natur*] ... inseparable from him ... but nevertheless distinguishable from him [*unabtrennliches, aber doch unterschiedenes Wesen*]. (SW VII: 358; PINH: 33–34)

The inseparable *Grund* of God does not precede God qua personality or qua livingness (either chronologically, or logically). Here, Schelling sets a kind of *epoché* on the coordinates of inner–outer, before–after, urging: "God contains himself in an inner basis of his existence, which ... precedes him as to his existence, but similarly God is prior to the basis[,] as this basis ... could not be if God did not exist in actuality" (SW VII: 358; PINH: 33).

This argument is crucial because it will ultimately justify humans' *being* in God *as well as* their freedom to commit evil acts—and we may legitimately describe the birth of the God-personality from the God-Basis without fearing recourse to fables *or* analogy because, precisely, we are ourselves one aspect of

not a distinctive and particular substance, *even though it be a consequence of A'*" (SW VII: 344; PINH: 15). My italics.

⁸ Werner Marx, *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling: History, System, and Freedom*, trans. Thomas Nenon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 61: "At the same time, divine Being is the 'Universe,' 'absolute totality' [SW IV: 128–29], and contains nature and the finite intellect as forces within itself. All finite and the singular beings, the plurality, are thus simultaneously real and ideal within this unity of a qualitative identity."

the absolute, of “God.”⁹ The relationship between these aspects of the absolute is simultaneously in-different—there is no *tertium comparationis* by which to define their difference—and the relationship is tensed. Existing in the most amorphous sense, the aspects coexist *as* God, inseparably yet without the interaction or possible reciprocation precursive to a dialectics of becoming (as in Hegel’s initial and purely formal dialectic, of being and nothing in the subjective *Logic*). At this “virtual” degree of coming-into-being, then, we may focus on either one of two “equally eternal beginnings of self-revelation” (SW VII: 395; PINH: 80). From the point of view of their tensed coexistence, “the first beginning of creation is the longing [*Sehnsucht*] of the One to give birth to itself, or the will of the depths” (“*es sei die Sehnsucht, die das ewige Eine empfindet*”). Through the same will, modalized now as love, arises an incipient coherence and intelligibility that Schelling calls *das Wort*—principle of personality and spirit.

The unfolding of the two *Wille*, that of the “middle nature like desire or passion” and that which is “altogether free and conscious” (SW VII: 395; PINH: 102), crosses through all becoming. The unfolding “vitalizes” Spinozistic necessity by *thinking* a living unconscious and by urging that the “geometric reasoning which has ruled so long” coexist with the passionate and the spiritual. Schelling writes of the “irrational relationship [*irrationale Verhältnis*]” between nature and reason (SW VII: 395). This uni-dualism of principles—which for Schelling is also a return to what was best in Leibniz; viz., “laws of nature [that] are morally [in the sense of practically] necessary” (SW VII: 396; PINH: 103)—the uni-dualism of the principles at the birth of God from itself is thus found in animals and humans alike. Schelling offers the image of light emerging from obscure gravity, a figure so vivid that it was lost neither on Gilles Deleuze nor on Slavoj Žižek, albeit for quite different ends. We will see why it is also important to note that the modalization of the will of love as *das Wort* is indebted to Kabbalism flowing through Philo into Abulafia’s ecstatic mysticism—in short, Matthew Arnold’s much-cited Jew-Greek that is also Greek-Jew.¹⁰ No doubt Christian adaptations of Kabbalah,

⁹ In his essay, “La naissance angoissée de l’Absolu: Autour des *Recherches sur l’essence de la liberté humaine* et des *Âges du monde* de Schelling,” Étienne Pelletier (Université de Montréal) cites Augustin Dumont pondering Schelling’s *Die Weltalter*: “[L]’acte philosophique de dire le développement temporel de l’absolu, c’est-à-dire de le raconter, n’est que l’explicitation à soi de cet absolu, mais cette explicitation doit être elle-même ‘naturante.’” See *Laval théologique et philosophique* 73, no. 1 (2017): 53–73. “Le récit inévitablement humain du passé de l’absolu est donc sommé d’être, à l’instar de l’absolu, naturant et créateur.” See Augustin Dumont, “Le langage du temps,” *Methodos [online]* 14 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4000/methodos.3740>.

¹⁰ Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia and Ecstatic Kabbalah* (New York: Facsimile Publisher, 2016), 57. Schelling’s claim that “even he who has moved out of the center retains the *feeling that he has been all things when in and with God*” (390) rings like the direct uptake of Abulafia’s *Devekuth* or *unio mystica* with God. In Judaism, as in Christianity, it is, of course, antinomian.

like Jakob Böhme's, confronted the further challenge of a triune god with minimal "emanations" or *sephirot*. But I am anticipating my discussion of Levinas.

In the cosmic genealogy, nature emerges with the birth of light, albeit never losing the dark principle from which the light was raised (SW VII: 377; PINH: 54); at a higher degree, however, the same biune principle gives rise to spirit, which Schelling aligns with the realm of history (SW VII: 377–78; PINH: 54). A common matrix thus guides the unfolding of history and nature. But within the realm of spirit, the dark principle moves through passion as an excitation or e-motion (*Erregung*), seeking to move itself from the neutral core (*Zentrum*) of the being to its periphery. Whilst in animals the two principles remain in balance, in humans there arises a choice or possibility: to enact the will of the depths or to incarnate the will of love. "Indeed, the dark ground operates incessantly in individual man too, and rouses egotism and a particularised will just in order that the will of love may arise in contrast to it" (SW VII: 381; PINH: 57–58). Particularisation thus emerges from the interaction of the two wills, though it is *Angst* in man that drives him "out of the center (*Zentrum*) in which he was created" (SW VII: 381; PINH: 57–58). This illustrates what has been deemed the emanationism in Schelling's logic,¹¹ though he rejects Neo-Platonism as unable to account for evil and freedom.

Be that as it may, we see the tension between his struggle to preserve the importance of individual actions, whether good or evil, and the power of the will of love to reconcile and to unify. This is what I am calling the *chiaroscuro* theodicy. Indeed, the echoes of this extraordinary cycle show up in places as diverse as Freud's metapsychological conceptions of Eros and Thanatos. For Schelling, then, in each person, then, the interaction of *Angst* and *Erregung*, embodying the tension between the two principles, plays itself out according to the self that has emerged. Although there is a historical teleology explicit in these pages—not to mention an oblique reference to the Apocalypse of John (SW VII: 379–80; PINH: 56–57)—it is not clear that that telos will be realized in "the present age"; nothing indicates that the principle of light will triumph

¹¹ Schelling reminds his readers that St. Augustine criticized emanationism as unable to explain the origin of man from the substance of God. Nothing comes from God but God; the corruptibility and essential lack in humans is explained by their being created *ex nihilo*. For Schelling, however, the nothing in question should well be *the question* for us: "Augustinus sagt gegen die Emanation: aus Gottes Substanz könne nichts hervorgehen denn Gott; darum sei die Kreatur aus Nichts erschaffen, woher ihre Korruptibilität und Mangelhaftigkeit komme (*De liberum Arbitrium*, L. I, C. 2). Jenes Nichts ist nun schon lange das Kreuz des Verstandes. Einen Aufschluß gibt der Ausdruck der Schrift: der Mensch sei *ek tōn mē ontōn*, aus dem, das da nicht ist, geschaffen, so wie das berühmte *mē on* der Alten, welches, so wie die Schöpfung aus Nichts, durch die obige Unterscheidung zuerst eine positive Bedeutung bekommen möchte" (SW VII: 379–80; PINH: 56–57).



and not sink back into primordial chaos,¹² “into the *turba gentium* which overflow the foundations of the ancient world as once the waters of the begin *again* cover the foundations of primeval time” (SW VII: 380; PINH: 57, emphasis added). In time, however, the “point of origin” or *Basis* will be resorbed into light, or drift into insignificance. But the problem is that this “*in time*” fails to capture the necessity with which the principle of love triumphs; that is, how God, conceived as the one—though ever in the uni-duality that began Schelling’s exposition of his two principles—unifies or sublimates that dark principle in light. Until then—if there is indeed a “then”—the wisdom Schelling urges us to pursue is a *gnōthi seautōn*, which, holding reason ever close to “the heart,” does not contravene the “most sacred sentiments and feelings and moral consciousness (*Gemüt und sittlichen Bewußtsein*)” (SW VII: 413; PINH: 92). As he urges two years later in the *Weltalter* (1811), a certain theosophy *must* dwell with philosophy, keeping its sights on the positivity of revelation that begins, firstly, in nature itself.

It is not my aim to comment on or criticize this extraordinary text, which crowned the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling and the intuitions of which accompany him, throughout his unpublished thought, into the *Philosophy of Revelation*. It remains extraordinary because, through the self-birth of the universe, it establishes a natural teleology built upon a natural theology of creation or what we could call “Being” or “life.” Through the higher-degree birth of humans out of nature and spirit, Schelling further opened rational theology to an ethics of the good will,¹³ reflecting the divine will of love. He thus assumed the task of bridging “natural theology and *revealed* religion,”¹⁴ proposing his original solution to the Kantian dilemma. Moreover, I believe Heidegger is right to say that Schelling did not so much change systems as struggle “passionately ever since his earliest periods for his one and unique

¹² After comparing Schelling and Schlegel, Hans Blumenberg put his finger on the dilemma that gives rise to the temptation to dualism or Gnosticism, with an eye to Schelling’s youthful work: “When the Greek discovered the cosmos *and* tragedy, the relation of the gods to the admired world-order remained unclarified and doubtful for them. It was to emerge that Christianity, too, could not overcome this ambivalence—indeed, that it intensified it even further because it had to claim the identical God for the creation *and* for its redemption. How the perfection of the first act could allow the second act’s desperate intervention to become necessary was *so far from being satisfactorily explicable* that the Gnostic separation of the responsibilities for the world and for salvation had to remain *the most tempting solution to this radical dilemma.*” *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 71. (First published in German by Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975.)

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment, Including the First Introduction*, trans. W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 326–34; *Kants Werke Akademie Textausgabe V*, 438–47.

¹⁴ Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*. First published in 1861 in Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, XIII and XIV. I use the German and the two-volume French translation *Philosophie de la révélation*, trans. Jean-François Marquet and Jean-François Courtine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 46. Pagination from the French.

standpoint,” which is precisely this solution to the natural theology–revealed religion tension.¹⁵ Now, if the *Philosophy of Revelation* stands as anything like the culmination of his struggle, then we might note that, by 1840, the system unfolds according to a three-term logic of the *can-be* (*Seinkönnende*), the mere-being (*Seiende*), and a third term that Schelling chose to leave unnamed. “The third cannot be defined otherwise than as *that which is effectively free to be and not to be.*”¹⁶ This excluded-included middle, in which the freedom to be or not to be coexisted as effective possibility, denotes the unique source of all acting and willing, beyond understanding and theorization. Not so unlike the light principle that consummates the path taken in the *Inquiries*, the *Philosophy of Revelation*’s unpronounceable third term completed “that, which will be” and so, “with this determination we have ... reached,” said Schelling, “the absolute.”¹⁷

I would argue that this “theodicy” is less “*chiaroscuro*” than unutterable. What, after all, do we gain by opposing binaries like possible–impossible to a philosophy of becoming, which dogged the possibility of synoptic intuition? Schelling’s recurrence to Ploucquet’s logic of perspectival conciliation allowed him to valorize an indeterminacy that Manfred Frank clarifies this way: supposing De Morgan’s Law, dating from after Schelling’s work, that the negation of a disjunction $\neg (A \vee B)$ is equivalent to the conjunction of the two terms negated ($\neg A \ \& \ \neg B$), it remains that in the initial, disjunctive formulation, *one* of the terms opposed *can* be positive. By contrast, in the second expression, the conjunction shows only two negated terms. Formally, they would be equivalent. What then has happened? The “positivity” in the initial disjunction has passed without apparent residue into the conjunction of negated terms. But this is the case only in one of the aspects of this conceptual deployment. According to another aspect, the positivity persists hereafter, as if imperceptible in the formalization. You can imagine how useful such a logic was for thinking the two natures of God in the Christian trinity (Jesus as man and Jesus as God). For Schelling, however, this logic pointed *beyond* idealist formalism toward a positive philosophy of paradoxical conciliation.

The connection to Levinas passes through Franz Rosenzweig’s struggle against Hegelianism in *The Star of Redemption* (1921). But Levinas sets it into a kind of phenomenology, or a pre-phenomenology, steeped as he is in the rationalist Judaism that contested Kabbalah. Thus, during his captivity in the officers’ camp at Fallingbommel, Levinas reflected on the basis of existence out of which arises intelligibility or, for him, active intentionality. Already in

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Introductory Remarks of the Lecture Course,” in *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 1–13.

¹⁶ Schelling, *Philosophie de la révélation*, 235.

¹⁷ Schelling, *Philosophie de la révélation*, 238.

1944, he wrote: “Hypostase – comme terme par lequel je pourrais remplacer la notion de subjectivité.”¹⁸ This would be a minimalist subjectivity arising, Schelling-like, out of itself, out of its sleeping body. That would be his way of contesting Heidegger’s almost a-subjective *Dasein*. And Levinas immediately added a Schelling-like reflection on good and evil, citing the Talmudic gloss on Genesis 25:22: “‘But the children [Jacob and Esau] struggled in her [Rebecca’s] womb.’ This evokes both the co-originary of good and evil, and the roots of Judaism and Christianity (Genesis 32: 29).” Now this might seem a peculiar reading of Judaism *or* Christianity, and we can well wonder what connects Jacob and Esau with the *hypostasis* with which Levinas replaces subjectivity. Is he thinking of Kabbalah? He is certainly not thinking only of gnostic dualism, any more than Schelling was. He adds, “Les principes du bien et du mal qui ont dans le judaïsme et le christianisme la même source—tragique de cette communauté d’origine. Dans la religion d’Ormud et d’Orient il n’en est rien [Zoroastrianisme, Manichéisme].”¹⁹

Whatever we make of Levinas’s interpretation of dualism, the common source of good and evil in Judaism and Christianity bespeaks the tragedy of the human and the ever-present possibility of evil. Obviously, felling trees in an officer’s camp while his family was murdered motivated Levinas to take evil seriously, as an existential. To be sure, Levinas was interested in a subject—better, in a consciousness emerging from impersonal consciousness, or even from its sleeping body. He was rethinking, as I said, Heidegger’s *Dasein* as the site of listening and questioning. What he seeks is a “sub-ject” that is thrown, embodied, *jacere*, but not yet master of its intentions and acts—in a word, a *Basis*. Levinas writes in the same notebook, “*Anokbi* [in Hebrew, the word for the ‘I’ of mastery]. It does not encompass the unity of its personality [*ne comprend pas l’unité de sa personne*], and yet it is conditioned by this contradiction,” which Schelling identifies as the tension between good and evil.²⁰

Thinking within Judaism and Husserlian phenomenology, Levinas imagines “situations” that afford us access to a pre-reflective, profoundly embodied experience, in which Being and self are indeterminately mingled. Between 1944 and 1947, when he publishes *De l’existence à l’existant*, this is the *il y a*, the moiling contrapositive of Heidegger’s *es gibt*, which echoes the universal *Basis* in Schelling as much as the *tohu–va vohu* preceding creation in Genesis.²¹ Out of this *il y a* prior to subjects and objects arises the

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, “Carnet V” [1944], in *Carnets de captivité et autres inédits*, Vol. I (Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 2009), 146–147, 488 n. 20.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Carnets de captivité*, 147, 488 n. 22.

²⁰ Levinas, *Carnets de captivité*, 146–47. My translation.

²¹ Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1978); followed by Alphonso Lingis’s English translation *Existence and Existents* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001).

“hypostasis”—a term we find when Jewish mysticism sets to speaking “Greek” (from Philo to Abulafia). Important in Levinas’s *mises en scène* of sleeplessness and awakening is that the hypostasis arises from its localization, from its body, like the first intelligible from the ground zero of Being. Where Schelling spoke of a kind of tension between the two first principles, Levinas proposes a phenomenology of awakening. Rather than dialectizing, the hypostasis emerges as if ecstatically from Being, over which it then assumes a certain mastery, for itself. Levinas writes:

Par la position dans l’*il y a* anonyme s’affirme un sujet. Affirmation au sens étymologique du terme, position sur un terrain ferme, sur une base, conditionnement, fondement. Le sujet qui s’arrache à la vigilance anonyme de l’*il y a* n’a pas été cherché comme *pensée* ou comme *conscience*, ou comme esprit.²²

The watchword is “basis,” the “sur-une-base” out of which a subject affirms itself, takes on consistency. Levinas adapts this in such a way that it no longer serves theodicy or theosophy, but a phenomenology of the body, which is neither Husserl’s *Leib-Körper* nor is it Heidegger’s open site in the world.

Like Schelling seeking the root common to nature and history, Levinas will argue:

Our investigation did not start with the ancient opposition of the ego to the world. We were concerned with determining the meaning of a much more general fact, that of the very apparition of an existent, a substantive in the heart of this impersonal existence, which ... we cannot give a name to, for it is a pure verb.²³

From the becoming or verblivity of Being borrowed from Schelling—as from Franz Rosenzweig who appropriated Schelling’s logic in 1921—from pure verblivity arises a substantive, a word or noun. In what Kabbalah conceived as a contraction of being or God, a word congeals that is *creative*. If Schelling sought to revitalize Spinoza and to clarify what was deemed Spinoza’s “pantheism,” and if this required “*die ganze Macht einer ... gründlich ausgebildeten Philosophie*,” as we have seen, then Levinas is struggling against his targets of Hegelian dialectics and Heidegger’s “always-already thrownness” of Dasein. Like Schelling, he requires the power of a philosophy fundamentally worked out, this time biblical; one in which “the word *davar* [meaning both “word” and “thing”] teaches us ... that any dissociation between the universe of

²² Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*, 139–40; *Existence and Existents*, 82.

²³ Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*, 139–40; *Existence and Existents*, 82.

language and that of Being is foreign to the Hebrew language.”²⁴ In short, creation emerges from and as the *Said (du Dit)* of God, “because the Word [*le Verbe*], in its purity, is creative”—an intuition hardly lost on Schelling, with its permutations specific to Jewish and Christian mysticism.²⁵

Recall now that Schelling had urged that the relationship between the *Basis* and *das Wort* or meaning-incipient can be understood as “a birth out of darkness into light.” As Schelling rhapsodized, “the seed must be buried in the earth and die in darkness in order that the lovelier creature of light should rise and unfold itself in the rays of the sun. Man is formed in his mother’s womb; and only out of the darkness of unreason (out of feeling, out of longing . . .) grow clear thoughts” (SW VII: 360). In his turn, Levinas rethinks being and time, in light of Heidegger. At the source of thrownness and futural temporality, Levinas sets the instant of emergence:

This movement, of coming to oneself without having left from anywhere, is not to be confused with that which spans an interval of time. It comes to pass in an instant itself where something . . . precedes the instant. The essence of an essence, its effectuation consists in spanning this inner distance.²⁶

What “precedes” the instant and thus phenomenological temporalization is “[t]he drama inherent in an instant itself, its struggle for existence, which mechanism fails to recognize when it takes an instant to be a simple and inert element of time.”²⁷ Out of its own bodily basis, and prior to any distinction between being and beings, emerges, “dramatically,” the hypostasis as incipient crystallization of subjectivity. *This* sub-ject²⁸ is a birth neither out of the world nor out of Being, and therefore ventures to contest Heidegger’s ontological

²⁴ André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1970 [English edition]); 99 in the original.

²⁵ Neher writes: “The most popular of the Jewish interpreters of the Bible, Rashi, proposes what amounts to a broader interpretation of the Midrashic books to which John (in John 1:1) is most probably referring: if creation could be born from the *Said [du Dit]* of God, it is only because the Word [*le Verbe*], in its purity, is creative The unity of the *davar* implies that the word [*parole*] accompanies every coming into presence and constitutes, in André Neher’s beautiful expression, its ‘rhythm’” (99).

²⁶ Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*, 131; *Existence and Existents*, 75–76.

²⁷ Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*, 129; *Existence and Existents*, 74.

²⁸ Jean-François Courtine translates the term literally, and with an eye toward Aristotle’s metaphysics, as the *jaçant-au-fond* or lying-at-the-base. See “Schelling et l’achèvement de la métaphysique” in *Extase de la raison: essais sur Schelling* (Paris: Galilée, 1990), 169–99, esp. 185: “le jaçant-au-fond, c’est ce sans quoi un autre ne peut pas être, mais qui lui-même peut être sans l’autre. Du même coup, sa *priorité* . . . [il] est seulement ‘ce sans quoi,’ mais non pas ‘ce grâce à quoi’ une chose est précisément la chose qu’elle est.”

difference. It is like Schelling's birth out of self, and nightly, cyclically, it "dies back into itself" by falling asleep. Levinas transposes Schelling's absolute to the human. Schelling would hardly have rejected such a transposition, I think.

For Levinas, the paradox of a birth out of self is that this coming into being "is" only in its now, its instant. But if we shift perspectives slightly, we discover that "dans l'instant lui-même," there is "quelque chose si l'on peut dire [qui] précède l'instant," as I said.²⁹ Via this Schellingian and chiasmatic logic, the present is absolute birth and anything that lies "before" the instant of the emergence of hypostasis from its base, is simply beyond representation.³⁰

We might here recall Schelling's words: "Without this preceding gloom, creation would have no reality; darkness is its necessary heritage. Only God—the *Existent himself*—dwells in pure light; for he alone is self-born" (SW VII: 360, emphasis added).

Beyond these indicative remarks, Schelling's influence on Levinas could well be shown systematically. For my purposes, the question of evil in Levinas becomes the question of freedom and the tension between intelligibility and ground, or the hypostasis and the *il y a*. Does Levinas's *il y a* lead in some way to evil or is it above all a way to think birth processually and instantaneously? Recall Levinas's *Carnets de captivité* notes on Genesis 25:22. Good and evil are co-originary in the womb. Jacob and Esau struggled already before they came into the world. The *il y a* is not evil in itself, any more than the *Basis* is evil. But Levinas's *il y a* is not ecstatic, either. It is a "ground" out of which arises an embodied being, the "hypostasis," through whose

²⁹ Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existent*, 131; *Existence and Existents*, 75.

³⁰ Levinas, *De l'existence à l'existent*, 131; *Existence and Existents*, 75.

Compare the use, here, of "accomplir l'événement du commencement" with an entry from "Carnet VII," which dates from 1944 or 1945: "Chez Heidegger [l']existence accomplit la compréhension. (Il prend l'idée husserlienne de l'intention spécifique, adéquate à l'être des objets, pour voir dans les faits de l'existence, dans toute leur concrétion, des compréhensions.) Pour moi, l'existence accomplit mais non pas en tant que compréhension. Elle accomplit spécifiquement—ce n'est pas un événement extérieur—mais la compréhension est en dehors de l'accomplisse [sic]. La compréhension toujours théorique, toujours lumière. Elle donne à l'accomplissement sa signification propre—qui est dans la tension dramatique (—temps—*felix culpa*). (Par elle [la tension dramatique] ce n'est pas un événement extérieur), c'est le symbole anticipant. Mais le symbolisme, [connaissance?] philosophie—n'est pas l'événement même." Levinas, *Carnets de captivité*, 184.

By restricting his investigations to a pre-ontological *comprehension* by Dasein of its Being, Heidegger remains at a conceptual-intuitive level that Levinas here calls "symbolic"; the symbolic is not language so much as it is already representation. In that way, it is not an event *per se*; it has already happened. Cf., *Totalité et infini* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 182: "le corps est en fait la façon dont un être, ni spatial, ni étranger à l'étendue ... physique, existe séparément Non pas qu'à une intention dite théorique, base du moi, s'ajouteraient des volontés, des désirs et des sentiments, pour transformer la pensée en vie. La thèse strictement intellectualiste subordonne la vie à la représentation." Emphasis added.

emergence a sub-ject that is both *moi* and *soi*, intentional and corporeal, eventuates as if otherwise than (Heidegger's) Being that calls silently within *Da-sein*. The least we can say is that embodiment, understood as the life of the drives, allows Levinas to ponder evil as chaos and suffering. That is, he approaches evil from the perspective of the other who *suffers it*.

Earlier I had written: "There is no theodicy in Levinas," but now I am inclined to say that there is a contemporary theodicy here, less concerned with justifying God's good, or God's justice, than with responding to Heidegger: that is, "Otherwise than Being" also means "Otherwise than Nothing"—otherwise than Heidegger's 1936 flight of the gods, otherwise than all his cryptic remarks about the divine *needing* Being, any more than Schelling's birth of God needs Heidegger's Being in a way other than the Being that it provides itself thanks to its biune development. Suffice it to say that if Levinas's phenomenology never sought to explain evil, it takes it as seriously as did Schelling.

On the other hand, Levinas does show us a psychological way in which suffering points beyond the evil of human egotism in Schelling (i.e., the will of the self, *Eigennillens*). Suffering comes to denote the "alterity" of a memory that does not synthesize into phenomenology's synthetic, flowing time-consciousness. This conception of evil serves his strategy of linking suffering with intersubjective passion; if you will, "our" pre-conscious ("irrational") inability to get through the melancholia—or trauma—of having failed to assist one who suffered and to whom "we" did not respond. Is this perspective an adequate justification of evil's reality? Can Schelling's theodicy be replaced by Levinas's patho-*dicy*? Perhaps, but above all, it does undercut Schelling's drive-self that strives to move out of the center and toward a passional hegemony over reason. It undercuts this drive-self by inquiring how it is that "we" become aware at all of the co-presence of good and evil, that same co-presence that Levinas found in the Bible, and Schelling in Böhme's Christian Kabbalah. Like the phenomenological descriptions he proposed of the hypostasis, the priority of evil as drives-based and willed gets shifted toward its condition of possibility in intersubjectivity: that is, in the emergence of self from itself out of its bodily location, which for Levinas is followed by the higher-level emergence of the ego through social encounters. The Schellingian logic seems still present. And I find this a productive approach to evil, as it neither abstracts it nor rationalizes it. Not unlike Schelling, it re-thinks the question, shifts perspective, and asks: in what sense, for us today, is evil ineluctable?