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ORIGINAL PAPER

An end to evil? Philosophical and political reflections

Fred Dallmayr

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Abstract After a long period of neglect and complacency, the problem of evil has powerfully resurfaced in our time. Two events above all have triggered this resurgence: the atrocities of totalitarianism (summarized under the label of "Auschwitz") and the debacle of September 11 and its aftermath. Following September 11, a "war on terror" has been unleashed and some writers have advocated an all-out assault on, and military victory over, evil. Taking issue with this proposal, the paper first of all examines the meaning of "evil" as articulated by philosophers and theologians through the centuries. Next, the focus is shifted to a particularly trenchant and innovative formulation which recognizes both the reality of evil and the importance of human freedom: Schelling's famous treatise of 1809. Following, a review of several important readings of this text (from Heidegger to Richard Bernstein), the paper concludes by pleading in favor of moral pedagogy as an alternative to the agenda of military victory.

Keywords Auschwitz · Bernstein R. · Heidegger M. · Human freedom · Jonas H. · Manichaeism · Radical evil · Schelling F.W.J. · Sufism · Theodicy · Vedanta · Zizek S.

Things long ignored or repressed often return with a vengeance. Evil, or the problem of evil, is a case in point. Heirs to the Enlightenment and wedded to unlimited progress, Western societies in recent centuries have tended to sideline evil as a spook or else as the relic of a distant past. In the poignant words of Lance Morrow: "The children of the Enlightenment sometimes have an inadequate understanding of the possibilities of Endarkenment (Morrow 2003)." Two events in more recent times have disrupted this complacency and catapulted evil back into the limelight of attention. The first was the experience of totalitarianism, and especially the atrocities of the Nazi regime summarized under the label of "Auschwitz." As Richard Bernstein writes, echoing Hannah Arendt: "What happened in the camps was the most extreme and radical

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form of evil. 'Auschwitz' became a name that epitomized the entire Shoah, and came to symbolize other evils that have burst forth in the twentieth century (Bernstein 2002)." Following the second World War, the memory of these atrocities was kept alive in some quarters—but was counteracted by the rising tide of consumerism and the tendency of the culture industry to trivialize evil again or turn it into an underground "punk aesthetic." Then came the second major jolt: September 11, the ensuing "war on terror" and the offensive against the "axis of evil." To quote Morrow again: "There came a crack in history, September 11, 2001, and George W. Bush's 'Axis of Evil', and all that followed. The idea of evil regained some of its sinister prestige and seriousness (Morrow 2003)."[1]

In light of the enormous calamities of the past 100 years, it would be entirely vain—as well as foolish and dangerous—to ignore the reality of evil or to underestimate its power. There is simply no passable way back into trivial innocence. Once this is recognized, the central question becomes: how to deal with the acknowledged presence of evil in the world, that is, its presence both in ourselves and in others? In a recent book titled *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, David Frum and Richard Perle—both insiders in the American "beltway" of power—have proposed a solution to this question: the forced termination of evil. In their words: "We do not believe that Americans are fighting this evil to minimize it or to manage it. We believe they are fighting to win... There is no middle way for Americans. This book is a manual for victory (Frum and Richard 2003)." A victory over evil: certainly a tall order and an ambitious claim! Properly to assess this claim requires an answer to (at least) two prior questions. First: what is the nature of evil—especially radical evil—such that it can be decisively terminated or vanquished? And secondly: Is it a proper policy objective for the United States—a country dedicated to "freedom" and democracy—to pursue this terminal goal, or is this goal perhaps self-defeating? In the following I wish to explore these and some related questions. I first turn to the meaning of "evil" and discuss—in all brevity—how this meaning has been construed by philosophers and theologians through the centuries. I next focus on a famous construal which recognizes both the reality of evil and the importance of human freedom: Schelling's treatise on "The Nature of Human Freedom." Following a review of some trenchant readings of this treatise (from Heidegger to Bernstein) I return to the solution proposed by Frum and Perle and offer a counter-proposal.

Some theories of evil

As philosophers and theologians have always acknowledged, "evil" is a staggering problem almost defying comprehension; some have treated it as utterly recalcitrant: a Sisyphan labor to extract sense from nonsense, meaning from the meaningless. Still, unwilling to admit defeat, philosophical and theological ingenuity has produced a plethora of formulations designed to shed light on the problem. In the present context, it cannot be my purpose to offer a comprehensive overview of these formulations; some rough typologies must suffice. In her book *The Many Faces of Evil*, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty provides a complex, six-fold typology of metaphysical–theological treatments of evil. In abbreviated form, the six types argue respectively: first, that

[1] Regarding the trivialization of evil and its reduction to a "punk aesthetic" Morrow refers to Delbanco (1995).

there is only divine goodness while evil is an illusion (what is often called "theodicy"); secondly, that there is some evil, but the latter is only a lesser degree or a "privation" of goodness (a view prominently associated with St. Augustine); thirdly, that good and evil are both real and permanently conflicting forces (what is called "Manichaeism"); fourthly, that human reason postulates a perfectly rational universe but acknowledges evil as a dilemma (a view ascribed to Kant); fifthly, that evil is real and the world is a mess (Schophenhauer); and sixthly, that good and evil are nothing in themselves but only social constructs (Hobbes and possibly Nietzsche).[2] By contrast, Susan Neiman in her book *Evil in Modern Thought* makes do with only two major types: namely, arguments relying on "fire from heaven" and arguments bent on "condemning the architect." Whereas the former are advanced by philosophers celebrating divine or rational "order" despite real-life experience to the contrary, the second are favored by an assortment of realists, pessimists, and cynics (Neiman 2004).[3]

From my own perspective, Rorty's typology appears a bit cumbersome, while Neiman's account seems overly parsimonious. Without claiming any kind of completeness or greater theoretical adequacy, I find it preferable (for my own purpose) to distinguish between three major approaches to the understanding of evil. (For good measure, I might be willing to add a fourth category reserved for skeptics, cynics, and immoralists. However, since the latter tend to dismiss the distinction between good and evil, their approach does not really constitute an alternative mode of understanding evil.) The three categories which, in my view, have traditionally dominated discussions of evil are these: radical monism, radical dualism, and a third category involving a spectrum ranging from modified monism to modified dualism.[4] Radical monism holds that ultimate reality—being a reflection of the divine or a benevolent creator—is wholly good and perfect, whereas perceived imperfections are illusions or the result of ignorance. The theory is most famously associated with the name of Leibniz; but it can also be found in versions of Christian and neo-Platonic "gnosis," in the work of the great Indian "Advaita" thinker Shankara, and in esoteric forms of Islamic Sufism. The prototype of radical dualism is Manichaeism, but it can also be found in versions of "gnosticism" and in extreme Puritan theories of pre-destination (with their radical opposition between the "elect" and the "damned"). The middle ground between monism and dualism is occupied by neo-Platonic and Christian thinkers ready to acknowledge evil but giving primacy to divine goodness. Thus, in treating evil as a mere "privation" of goodness, Augustine approximates the monist view; however, by insisting on the "fallenness" of human nature and the distinction between the heavenly and earthly cities, his theory slides toward Manichaean dualism. In a similar way, modern rationalists—like Descartes and Kant—steer an ambivalent course between rational insight and ignorance. On the one hand, they grant primacy to rational order; but on the other, their separation of mind from nature (Descartes) or "noumena" from "phenomena" (Kant) carries strong dualist overtones.

Some examples may help to illustrate the preceding typology. In Western philosophy, the most famous example of radical monism is Leibniz's *Theodicy* (of 1710).

[2] Rorty (2001). I have slightly changed the numbering.

[3] Neiman includes in the first category thinkers like Leibniz, Pope, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, and in the second category thinkers like Pierre Bayle, Hume, Voltaire, and Schopenhauer. Because of their greater psychological nuances, she makes separate room for Nietzsche and Freud.

[4] Readers familiar with Indian philosophy will detect in the above echoes of the main forms of Vedanta philosophy: Advaita Vedanta, Dvaita Vedanta, and Vishisthadvaita Vedanta. On this tradition see, e.g., Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1928); H. N. Raghavendracharya (1941).

Seeking to absolve God from any complicity in the evils of the world, Leibniz presented these evils either as illusions or else as necessary instruments for the promotion of divine providence. As he wrote: "God wills order and the good; but it sometimes happens that what appears disorder in some part is actually order in the whole." Regarding the evidence of evil or wicked human acts, the text turned matters around by portraying such acts as evidence of the divine plan of salvation or redemption: "The same wisdom which made God create man innocent, though liable to fall, also makes him re-create or redeem man when he falls; for God's knowledge causes the future to be for him like the present."[5] Outside the Western confines, examples of monism can be found in several contexts. As indicated before, a prominent instance is the Indian philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, as articulated chiefly by Shankara (788–820). According to this philosophy, all beings have their true reality in "*brahman*" while the assumption of separate existences testifies to ignorance (*avidya*). The goal of "Advaitins" is to realize the ultimate identity of selfhood, and all its actions, with divine essence (*atman* is *brahman*) (see e.g., Deussen 1906; also Organ 1980). Similar formulations can readily be detected in Islamic civilization, especially its more mystical or intuitive strands. Amélie Rorty refers to the great Persian philosopher and mystic Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), and especially to one of his writings titled (in free translation) "There is No Evil in Allah's Perfect World (Rorty 2001, pp.54–55)." An even more fervent espousal of monism is the hallmark of forms of esoteric Sufism. In a bold text, bordering on heterodoxy, the "Great Sheikh" Ibn Arabi (1165–1246) proclaimed the ultimate unity of all things with divine reality without remainder or exception. As he stated: "Whoso ever knows himself" properly knows himself/herself as integral to divine-essence—leading to the conclusion that "*thou art He* without any limitations. And if you know thine existence thus, then thou knowest God; and if not, then not."[6]

Radical dualism is traditionally associated chiefly with Manichaeism, the doctrine according to which there are two contending and roughly equally matched forces in the world, each guided by a separate ruler or master: God and the "prince of darkness." Having originated in ancient Persia, the doctrine later was disseminated throughout the Middle East and came to form the backbone of Hellenistic "gnosticism" (where this term does not refer to "gnosis" or insight into the ultimate unity of all being but rather to knowledge of the conflictual division of the world resulting from "man's" partaking of the "tree of knowledge"). Amélie Rorty provides passages from writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, a Hellenistic devotee of gnosticism obsessed with the interminable warfare between goodness and evil, light and darkness. In the words of one such passage: "I say that there are demons who dwell with us here on earth, and others who dwell above us in the lower air, and others again whose abode is in the purest part of air... And the souls which have transgressed the rule of piety, when they depart from the body, are handed over to these demons, and are swept and hurled to and fro in those strata of the air which teem with fire and hail."[7] Without fully subscribing to equally matched forces, echoes of these gnostic teachings often surface in later Christian authors, especially during the Reformation

[5] von Leibniz (1985); cited from Amélie Rorty, *The Many Faces of Evil*, pp. 159–162. As Leibniz adds (p. 164): "The permission of evils comes from a kind of moral necessity: God is constrained to this by his wisdom and his goodness; *this necessity is happy.*"

[6] See Arabi (1976). For a fuller discussion see my (2004).

[7] Hermes Trismegistus, *Hermetica*; cited from Rorty (2001, p. 25). On gnosticism compare, e.g., Jonas (1963) and (1934–35); also Pagels (1995), and (1979).

and post-Reformation period. Thus, in his *Paradise Lost*, the Puritan John Milton gives ample room to the voice of "Satan" portrayed as the determined rebel and contender for ultimate control: "But of this be sure,/To do aught good never will be our task,/But ever to do ill our sole delight,/As being contrary to his high will/Whom we resist."[8] In some of his writings, Martin Luther moves even closer to the dualist doctrine. Thus, commenting on St. Paul's letters to the Romans and the Galatians, he envisages a quasi-Manichaean combat raging in human Life: "These two captains or leaders, the flesh and the spirit, are one against another in your body, so that you cannot do what you would... But we credit Paul's own words, wherein he confesses that he is sold under sin, that he is led captive of sin, that he has a law in his members rebelling against him, and that in the flesh he serveth the law of sin."[9]

The middle ground between monism and dualism is occupied by positions which modify the dominant alternatives—sometimes significantly (though without abandoning their basic premises). St. Augustine (354–430) is usually credited with having introduced an important new dimension into discussions of good and evil: namely, the central role of human will. As he wrote in "The Problem of Free Choice": "The mind becomes the slave of passion only through its own will." Hence: "The will is the cause of sin," and the latter cannot be attributed "to anything except to the sinner who wills it." Yet, as one should note, willing the good and willing something evil for Augustine were not on an equal level (which would have landed him in Manichaeism). Rather, honoring the primacy of divine order, he viewed only good will (or a will oriented toward goodness) as a proper and efficient exercise of willing, whereas an evil will opted for something only characterized by negativity, privation or deficiency—and hence for something not truly real: "Vice cannot be in the highest good, and cannot be but in some good. Things solely good, therefore can in some circumstances exist; things solely evil, never."[10] Under completely changed circumstances—during the period of the European Enlightenment—Immanuel Kant renewed and radicalized Augustine's focus on human will—though extricating this focus from its Christian-theological foil. Without subscribing to a divinely ordered universe, Kant treated "good will"—rooted in "noumenal freedom"—as the essence of human nature and morality. Good will for him meant behavior in accordance with the maxims stipulated by radical human freedom, while deviation from these maxims, that is, the choice of evil, meant an option for non-essence or a basic deficiency or vitiated conception of human nature. Distantly echoing St. Augustine, Kant writes in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* that the notion that "man is evil" can mean only that "he is conscious of the moral law [postulated by freedom] but has nevertheless adopted into his maxim the (occasional) deviation therefrom." As for the reasons prompting the slide from moral freedom to evil—or the lapse from nature into sin—Kant declares them (with St. Augustine) to be ultimately "inscrutable (See Kant 1960)."[11]

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[8] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*; quoted from Rorty, (2001, p. 124).

[9] Luther (1961); cited from Rorty, (2001, pp. 111–112).

[10] St. Augustine, *The City of God* and "The Problem of Free Choice"; cited from Rorty, (2001, pp. 49, 52–53). In *The City of God*, the account of evil differs significantly from Luther's incipient dualism (p. 51): "We must not attribute to the flesh all the vices of a wicked life, in case we thereby clear the devil of all those vices, for he has no flesh." During the Reformation John Calvin closely followed St. Augustine's teachings about evil as privation and also his opposition to Manichaeism. See Rorty(2001 pp. 121–122).

[11] For an excellent discussion of Kant's approach see the chapter "Radical Evil: Kant at War with Himself," in Bernstein, (2002, pp. 11–45). For St. Augustine's refusal to inquire behind the exercise of

In my own view, the first major advance beyond traditional approaches to good and evil occurred in the immediate post-Enlightenment period, particularly in the work of a thinker whose ideas were both formed by the Enlightenment and pointed resolutely beyond it: Friedrich W. J. Schelling. In this respect I fully concur with Bernstein when he writes: "I see Schelling not as a transitional figure en route to Hegel, but rather as transitional figure in *transforming* our (very) understanding of the problem of evil (Bernstein 2002, p.80)." What is distinctive about Schelling is the fact that he affirmed the "reality" of evil, but without lapsing into Manichaeism, and that he affirmed the goodness of God, but without denying God's complicity in the reality of evil. In conformity with Kant, he insisted on the centrality of human freedom in all issues having to do with good and evil; but, departing from Kant and the Enlightenment, he moved beyond anthropocentric "willing" by embedding the choice of good and evil in a larger ontological reality within which good and evil acquire significance in the first place. As Bernstein poignantly writes: "In his 'higher realism' Schelling seeks to avoid two extremes: absolute dualism and an undifferentiated homogeneous monism. . . He wants to avoid the consequence that there is an absolute duality of good and evil (that is how he understands Manichaeism), as well as those pseudo-solutions that reconcile good and evil by denying the reality of evil." One such pseudo-solution is the Augustinian formula of ascribing pure goodness to God while absolving God from any complicity in evil by treating the latter as mere deficiency or privation. For Schelling, such a formula ignores that genuine "freedom is a power for evil (Bernstein 2002, pp.80, 85)."[12]

Schelling's general opus is sprawling and stretches over several phases or periods. For present purposes, the most pertinent text is his study of 1809 entitled "Philosophical Inquires into the Nature of Human Freedom" (*Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*). The text is subdivided into several parts or sections, some of them critical of earlier conceptions and others—the core of the text—offering an alternative conception of both human freedom and its relation to evil. By way of introduction, Schelling clears up some issues which might stand in the way of his inquiry: whether "freedom" can be meaningfully discussed without broader "systematic" considerations; whether "pantheism" (a topic hotly debated at the time) is necessarily hostile to freedom or only in some cases; and finally, whether and in what sense Spinoza's system could be termed pantheistic and/or fatalistic. The mention of Spinoza opens a longer section of critical observations. For Schelling, Spinoza's work is the episteme of an abstract monism (quite independently of the meaning of his pantheism). In his words: "This system is not fatalism just because it lets things be conceived in God; for, as we have shown, pantheism does not make formal freedom impossible." Rather, the error of Spinoza's system is due "not to the fact that he posits *all things in God*, but to the fact that they are mere *things* [or objects]"—that is, "to the abstract conception of the world and its creatures, indeed of the eternal

Footnote 11 continued
will, compare his statement: "If there were a cause of the will. . . what could precede the will and be its cause? Either it is the will itself, and nothing else than the will is the root; or it is not the will which is not sinful. Either the will itself is the original cause of sin, or no sin is the original cause of sin. . .. I do not know why you would wish to look for anything further." See Rorty(2001, p. 53).

[12] The final citation is taken from Schelling (1936). In the following I use Gutman's translation; but I also consult, and constantly compare this translation with, the German original as found in *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, ed. T. Buchheim (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1997).

substance itself which is also a thing for him." It was in opposition to the abstract objectivism of Spinoza that later Enlightenment "idealism" constituted a dramatic advance: namely, by energizing, revitalizing, and spiritualizing the monistic system. What emerged as the highest idealist principle was free will or will as "primordial being," as "groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation." Yet, no matter to what height it raised philosophy, idealism as a monism necessarily left out of account its other side: nature and unwilled being. In Schelling's lapidary formulation:

> From this very fact it can be seen in advance that the most profound difficulties which lie in the concept of freedom will be as likely solvable through idealism, taken in itself, as through any other incomplete system. For idealism supplies only the most general conception of freedom, and a merely formal one at that. But the real and vital conception of freedom is that it is the possibility of good and evil (Bernstein 1936, pp. 22–24, 26).[13]

In discussing idealism, Schelling also reviews correctives introduced by some Enlightenment thinkers, including Fichte and Kant. Fichte's decision to construe the highest pinnacle of philosophy as "subjective activity and freedom" seemed indeed to energize monism further, but failed entirely to show how the rest of the world (including nature and the realm of things) was rooted in "subjective activity." In the case of Kant, freedom as "noumenal" capacity was defined as independence from or negation of nature and time—without any effort to move from negativity toward a "positive" notion of freedom (and evil). A similar limitation can be found in theories sublimating evil into goodness, or in accounts claiming that "evil is only a lesser degree of freedom," that in the end "there is nothing at all positive," and that the difference between actions is "a mere plus or minus of perfection." In such accounts, Schelling objects, "no antithesis is established, and all evil disappears entirely." Dissatisfied with this result, some thinkers throughout the ages have embraced antithesis and even radical dualism—a "solution," however, which is equally and perhaps even more objectionable in its consequences. If one assumes, as one should—Schelling writes—that evil is a real force and that freedom is a "positive" power for good and evil, then the problem arises how "evil can come from God who is regarded as utter goodness." The conclusion seems to impose itself that, if freedom is a power for evil, "it must have a root independent of God." Compelled by this argument one may then be tempted "to throw oneself into the arms of dualism." However, if really thought through as the doctrine of "two absolutely different and mutually independent principles," then this dualism "is only a system of self-destruction [or self-diremption, *Selbstzerreissung*] and of the despair of reason (Bernstein 1936, pp.24–25, 27, 28)."

Against the backdrop of these critical observations, Schelling delineates his own alternative conception—a conception which stresses difference without dualism, and unity without monistic sameness. The cornerstone of this conception is the distinction between two dimensions or senses of being: namely, actual existence (*Existenz*) and the basis or ground (*Grund*) of this existence. With regard to God, these two

[13] A little later Schelling adds this passage which in effect "deconstructs" idealism and points way beyond it (p. 30): "The whole of modern European philosophy since its inception (with Descartes) has this common deficiency that nature does not exist for it and that it lacks a living basis. On this account Spinoza's realism [objectivism] is as abstract as the idealism of Leibniz. Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is its body; only the two together constitute a living whole. Realism can never furnish the first principles but must be the basis and the instrument by which idealism realizes itself and takes on flesh and blood." For a fuller discussion of Leibniz see pp. 45–46.

dimensions are closely linked and even inseparable. "As there is nothing before or outside God," Schelling writes, "he must contain within himself the ground of his existence." This means that "the ground of his existence, though contained in God, in not God viewed as absolute, that is, insofar as he exists"; rather, it is only "the basis of his existence" or "*nature* in God"—which, to be sure, is "inseparable but yet distinguishable from him." What emerges here is the notion of a "becoming God" or rather a becoming "in" God, of a steady self-manifestation or epiphany (provided this process is not viewed in terms of linear temporality). In things or beings apart from God, a similar process of becoming takes place, but in a different sense. Again, the distinction between "ground" and "existence" prevails. To be separate or distinguished from God, such beings have to undergo becoming in a different manner; yet, since nothing can really be "outside" of God, the conclusion is that "beings have their ground in that dimension of God which is not God himself (as existence), but only the ground of his existence." This ground or nature in God, Schelling adds, is "the longing (*Sehnsucht*) which the eternal One feels to give birth to itself"; it is a longing that "seeks to give birth to God in his unfathomable unity, but to this extent has not yet the unity in itself." In a passage profoundly challenging Enlightenment rationalism, the treatise continues:

> This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into reason (*Verstand*) by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths. Out of this which is non-rational (*verstandlos*), reason in the true sense is born. 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... (But) human beings are formed in their mother's womb; and only out of the darkness of unreason (out of feeling, out of longing—that sublime mother of understanding) can clear thoughts grow.[14]

Given this grounding in dark nature, how does human growth or maturation occur? For Schelling, this process requires an "inner transmutation or sublimation (*Verklärung*) in light of what was originally the principle of darkness." Considered by itself and apart from such transmutation, the dark ground can be described as the basic "self-will (*Eigenwille*) of creatures," a self-will reduced to mere "craving or desire." As such, this creaturely will stands opposed as mere particularity to the more universal or "primal" will seeking to be revealed in all creation. In human beings, there is indeed the possibility of such an entrenchment in particularity or a refusal to transform self-will; however, there is equally the possibility of transmutation and of the "elevation of the most abysmal center into light." For Schelling, the distinctive quality of human beings consists precisely in the relation between darkness and light and in the possible perversion of this relation through self-will. As he writes: "In human beings we find the whole power of darkness and the whole force of light; in them dwell the deepest pit and the highest heaven." Basically, human will is or can be construed as the latent seed of the eternal longing buried in the ground of God; it is "the divine spark of life, locked in the depths, which God unleashed when he determined to will nature." In comparison with God, human beings are distinguished by the variable character of the relation between "ground" and "existence," by the fact that darkness can vitiate the light. In Schelling's formulation—which pinpoints

[14] Schelling (1936, pp. 31–35) (translation occasionally slightly altered).

the gist of his thesis: "If, now, the identity of the two principles were just as indissoluble in humans as it is in God, then there would be no difference—which means that God as existing spirit could not be revealed. Therefore, that unity which is indissoluble in God must be dissoluble in humans—and this constitutes the possibility of good and evil."[15]

The remainder of Schelling's treatise is devoted mainly to the further elaboration and clarification of his basic conception. The paths of good and evil, he notes, are indeed based on human choice (which entails ethical responsibility), but the choice itself responds to the structure of possibility (of good and evil). Self-will, we read, can "separate itself from light"; it may "as a particular will seek to be universal or what it can only be in its identity with the universal will." If this happens, then there is a division of selfhood from light or a dissolution of the linkage of ground and existence. By contrast, if human self-will remains embedded in "central will" and if the "spirit of love" is allowed to rule, then self-will exists in a divine manner and condition. An important point re-emphasized in this context is the linkage of freedom with the possibility of real evil—a linkage which is denied by some (Enlightenment) doctrines which construe freedom as the rational mastery of desires and inclinations, and goodness (or good will) as a synonym of pure reason. For Schelling, these doctrines completely divorce good and evil from any kind of grounding—neglecting that freedom is not just an empty capacity but a response to the ground–existence nexus. Option for the good, in particular—far from reflecting arbitrary whim—means a responsiveness to divine existence and self-manifestation; to this extent it can also be called a "religious" disposition: "Genuine religiosity allows no choice between alternatives, no *aequilibrium arbitrii*, but only the highest commitment to the right, without any choice." A final question raised in the text is whether there is a dimension antedating or presupposed by the distinction between ground and existence. Answering affirmatively, Schelling calls this dimension the "primal ground" (*Urgrund*), "un-ground" (*Ungrund*) or "absolute indifference"—where indifference does not mean sameness but a difference without duality or monism: "The un-ground divides itself into two equally eternal beginnings only in order that the two... should become one through love; that is, it divides itself only so that there may be life and love and personal existence."[16]

Some interpretations of Schelling

In introducing a recent collection of essays on Schelling, the editor presented his book as evidence "that after more than a century and a half of neglect, Schelling's time has arrived" and that, in a manner of speaking, the latter is now "a contemporary Continental philosopher." The statement is only partially correct. Actually, as the editor himself recognizes, neglect has prevailed mostly in the Anglo-American context and it is that same context that today witnesses "a bourgeoning Schelling renaissance (Wirth 2005)". Almost 70 years ago, in 1936, Heidegger presented his famous lecture course on Schelling's treatise on human freedom; and some 20 years later, Karl Jaspers and Walter Schulz revived interest in Schelling's later philosophy,

[15] Schelling (1936, pp. 38–39) (translation slightly altered).

[16] Schelling (1936, pp. 40–41, 47, 71, 87, 89) (translation slightly altered).

while Maurice Merleau-Ponty drew attention to Schelling's natural philosophy.[17] In the present context, it cannot possibly be my aim to present a survey of older and more recent interpretations. For the sake of brevity, I shall concentrate on a limited number of particularly prominent and insightful readings of Schelling's text. As virtually all commentators agree, the most influential and seminal of these readings is Heidegger's lecture course of 1936—which hence can serve as useful gateway to subsequent discussions. In this regard I follow Peter Warnek's judicious advice when he writes: "Anyone who would give thoughtful attention to the historical *timeliness* of Schelling's philosophical work today cannot rightfully neglect the contribution of Heidegger's careful and subtle reading of Schelling's difficult essay of 1809." I also concur with his (somewhat bolder) claim that Schelling's work "reveals itself only through an encounter with Heidegger, only at the limits of a Heideggerian reading (Warnek 2005)."

In his lecture course, Heidegger makes no secret of the high esteem in which he holds his predecessor. Schelling, he states, "is the truly creative and most far-reaching thinker of this whole age of German philosophy. He is it to *such* an extent that he drives German Idealism from within right past its own fundamental position (Heidegger 1989a)." The manner in which Schelling drives idealism beyond its foundations is through a decentering of its premises: particularly his effort to dislodge (at least partically) the cornerstone of the *cogito*, human subjectivity, and (more generally) "anthropocentrism." In Heidegger's view, this effort had profound repercussions on the notion of freedom. In modern Western thought, particularly its dominant ideology of "liberalism," freedom has tended to be construed as a human property or faculty, that is, an attribute owned by humans. Following Schelling, Heidegger's lectures at the very outset debunk this conception. This issue of human freedom, he writes, is usually treated under the rubric called the "problem of free will"; under this rubric one discusses whether human will is free or unfree and how the one or the other could be demonstrated. Basically freedom here signifies a "property of human beings" and one presumes somehow to know what "being human" means. "With this question of the freedom of the will, a question wrongly put and not even properly a question," Heidegger counters sharply, "Schelling's treatise has nothing whatever to do. For in Schelling freedom is not a human property or attribute, but the other way around: human *Dasein* figures as property of freedom." What this means is that freedom is "the comprehensive and all-pervasive matrix in and through which human beings become human in the first place." Still more boldly put—and this may well be a central thesis of Heidegger's entire opus: "The essence (*Wesen*) of humans is grounded in freedom. But freedom itself is the hallmark of authentic Being as such, a hallmark transcending or transgressing every finite human existence. Insofar as humans are human, they must needs partake in this hallmark of Being."[18]

[17] Martin Heidegger, *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1971), trans. by Joan Stambaugh as *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985). Compare also Jaspers (1955); Schulz (1955/1975); Merleau-Ponty (1995).

[18] Heidegger (1985, p.9) (translation slightly altered, especially to correct for gender bias). To underscore his point, Heidegger adds a memory aid (*Merksatz*): "Freedom not the attribute of humans, but humans the possession of freedom." In light of this key sentence, it is altogether unintelligible how Benjamin S. Pryor can write that "Heidegger will gradually turn away from freedom as a preoccupation." See Pryor, (2005, p. 231).

Turning to Schelling's conception of freedom as the possibility for good and evil, Heidegger accepts this formulation—but at the same time translates it into his own (ontological) terminology, thereby perhaps driving Schelling himself beyond his (still idealist) premises. In Schelling's treatise, he notes, freedom is connected with the variable relation between two modes of being: "ground" and "existence" (where the former does not coincide with rational pre-supposition). While in that treatise, the relation is termed "difference" (*Unterscheidung*), Heidegger introduces for the same linkage the notion of a "juncture of being" or a joining of modes of being (*Seynsfuge*). Basically, the juncture reveals a mode of temporal becoming within being itself, that is, the unfolding of an embryonic latency into spiritual self-manifestation. In the case of God or the divine, *Seynsfuge* implies a move from the darkness of divine nature to full spiritual epiphany or self-disclosure (a move not to be confused with emanation). In Heidegger's words:

> Schelling wants to accomplish precisely this: to conceive God's self-development, that is, how God—not as an abstract concept but as living life—unfolds toward himself. A *becoming* God then? Indeed. If God is the most real of all beings, then he must undergo the greatest and most difficult becoming, and this unfolding must exhibit the farthest tension between its 'whence' (where-from) and its 'wither' (where-to).

The wither or where-to is captured in Schelling's language by the term "existence" construed as the full revealment or epiphany of the divine, while "ground" points to the stage of latent concealment and obscurity—a perspective clearly consonant with Heidegger's notion of "*aletheia*" as revealment/concealment and also his linkage of becoming and being (or "being and time"). As the lecture course elaborates: "Existence (in Schelling) is understood from the outset as a move 'out of oneself', as an opening-up which, in opening and manifesting itself, precisely involves a coming into one's own (*zu sich selbst Kommen*) and thus the possibility of 'being' oneself (*Seyn*)." With regard to God this means: "Seen as existence, God is the *absolute* God or simply God himself. Viewed as the ground of his existence, God is not yet actually himself; and yet: God 'is' also his ground."[19]

As previously noted, the variable relation between ground and existence is the source of the capacity for good and evil, which in turn is the emblem of human freedom. For Schelling, divine becoming aims at progressive spiritualization or God's revealment as spirit—a disclosure which require an otherness or a foil to testify to this process. This foil is humankind or human being as his counterpart, though distinct from God. As a creature, human beings are rooted in "nature" or the latency of divine becoming; at the same time they are the receptacle of divine light, the locus where God's existence can become most fully apparent. This condition gives rise to conflicting possibilities: either a steady opening to divine existence, or else a perversion of the spiritual motif through withdrawal into self-will and ultimate obstinacy. In terms

[19] Heidegger (1985, p. 109) (translation slightly altered). As one should note, "becoming" for Schelling and Heidegger does not involve a linear temporality and thus is far removed from historicism. In Heidegger's words (p. 113): "One forgets to notice that in this 'becoming' that which becomes is already in the ground as ground.... God's becoming cannot be serialized into phases in the succession of ordinary 'time'; rather, in this becoming everything 'is' simultaneously.... This simultaneity of authentic temporality, this *kairos*, 'is' the essence of eternity—not the merely arrested presence or *nunc stans*." In view of Heidegger's extensive comments on God and the divine, it is perplexing how Joseph P. Lawrence can detect in his work a "new paganism" or a return to "the blind forces of pagan religiosity." See Lawrence (2005, pp. 16–17).

of Heidegger's commentary: *Dasein* can remain faithful to *Seynsfuge* by following the divine spirit. But it can also pervert existence by arrogating or appropriating existence in an act of intellectual conceit; more radically still, it can seclude itself entirely in the opacity of its ground or nature. To the extent that both appropriation and seclusion involve self-enclosure, human self-will here rises in an act of rebellion against divine existence and its universal bond. In the words of the lecture course: "Since human self-will is still linked to spirit (as freedom), this will can in the breadth of human endeavor seek to put itself in the place of the universal will; thus, self-will can... as particular-separate selfishness pretend to be the ground of the whole.... This ability is the capacity for evil." Repeating a point made at the beginning, what is involved here is not merely a problem of free will but a kind of ontological perversion. Basically, what happens is "the reversal of *Seynsfuge* into disjuncture or disjointedness (*Ungefüge*) whereby ground aggrandizes itself to absorb the place of existence."[20]

What is crucial in Heidegger's reading, in my view, is his resolute transgression of modern metaphysics centered in subjectivity and subjective will. As a consequence, ethical option (for good or evil) is not simply a free-standing choice but rather a mode of responsiveness to ways of being. For Heidegger, the capacity for good and evil is constitutive of the being of *Dasein*, reflecting its insertion in some form or other in *Seynsfuge*. "Humans alone," he reiterates, "are capable of evil; but this capacity in not a human property or quality; rather, to be capable in this sense constitutes the being of humans." Taken by itself, *Dasein* is neither good nor evil but capable of both. On the level of sheer possibility, it remains an "undecided being" hovering in "indecision" (*Unentschiedenheit*)—from which, however, it is propelled into the arena of decision by the need of self-realization. In Schelling's treatise (as well as in Heidegger's commentary), the transition from capability to living reality is guided neither by arbitrary whim nor by external compulsion but by a kind of inclination or bent (*Hang*) inclining human conduct in one way or another. In the case of evil, Schelling traces this bent to a "contraction of the ground" (*Anziehen des Grundes*), that is, to a self-enclosure of particularity which terminates indecision, but in such a way as to provoke divisiveness and disjuncture. On the other hand, goodness follows the attraction of spirit or existence, which in its most genuine form is the attraction of *eros* or love (*Liebe*). "Love," Heidegger states, "is the original union of elements of which each might exist separately and yet does not so exist and cannot really be without the other." However, love is not simply unity or identity but rather a unity in difference or a unity that lets otherness be—including the contraction of the ground and the resulting disjuncture. As he adds: "Love must condone the will of the ground, because otherwise love would annihilate itself. Only by letting the ground operate, love has that foil in or against which it can manifest its supremacy."[21]

[20] Heidegger (1985, pp. 141–143) (translation slightly altered). It is important to realize that for Heidegger (as for Schelling) evil, or the capacity for evil, is not simply a mode of privation or deficiency, but rather endowed with its own ontological potency. As he adds (p. 143): "Reversal and rebellion are nothing merely negative or nugatory, but rather involve the mobilization of nay-saying and nihilation into the dominant force."

[21] Heidegger (1985, pp. 147–149, 151). Toward the end of his commentary Heidegger adds these lines, containing a kind of post-metaphysical theodicy (p. 160): "God allows the oppositional will of the ground to operate in order to foster what love unifies and subordinates to itself for the glorification of the absolute. The will of love stands above the will of the ground and this predominance, this eternal decidedness—this love for itself as the essence of being—this decidedness is the innermost core of absolute freedom." In view of this and similar passages, Jean-Luc Nancy accuses Heidegger's account of harboring a new "ontodicy in which is preserved the possibility of a 'safeguard' or 'shelter' of

Among more recent interpretations, Richard Bernstein's reading stands out for its lucidity and its ability to situate Schelling's legacy in broader intellectual networks. What attracts Bernstein to Schelling is primarily his recognition of the reality of evil—a recognition crucial "after Auschwitz"—and also (as indicated before) his ability to avoid the temptations of monism and dualism while insisting on the differentiated relationship between good and evil. Schelling, he writes, "seeks to develop a *differentiated* monism in which there is no ultimate divide between nature and spirit"—and, one might add, neither an ultimate divide nor an ultimate identity between good and evil. Turning to recent philosophical trends. Bernstein finds an affinity between Schelling's position and contemporary modes of neo-naturalism, especially the "enriched non-reductive naturalism" advocated by John McDowell and others. With approval he cites McDowell's suggestion that: "If we can rethink our conception of nature so as to make room for spontaneity... we shall by the same token be rethinking our conception of what it takes for a position to deserve to be called 'naturalism' (See McDowell 1994)." In the same context he portrays as "imaginative and provocative" Slavoj Źiźek's proposal—in his book *The Indivisible Remainder*—to establish a linkage between Schelling's philosophy and a non-dogmatic and spiritualized kind of "materialism (See Zizek 1996)." Relying on these and related recent initiatives, Bernstein on the whole concurs with Schelling's complaint about the "common deficiency" of modern European philosophy—its sideling or disregard of nature—adding a cautionary warning against a widespread "dismissive attitude towards Schelling's project of a philosophy of nature." Prominently included among modern philosophers neglectful of nature is Immanuel Kant who—despite his attempt to "bridge the gap"—never (in Bernstein's account) managed to establish a "continuity between nature and freedom," between phenomenal and noumenal realms. In Schelling, by contrast, there is "no such gap" because it has given way to "sounder insight." This does not mean that Schelling rejects human freedom or moral responsibility (emphasized by Kant); but the latter are inserted into a broader matrix and never divorced entirely from the dark ground of nature.[22]

In tracing philosophical repercussions and affinities, Bernstein's reading also establishes connections with a number of perspectives not normally associated with Schelling's legacy, especially with Nietzsche and Freud seen as the great protagonists of a "moral psychology of evil." By insisting on the "material force" of evil, Schelling—for Bernstein—"anticipated" these two great protagonists and, in doing so, opened up new (depth psychological) "ways of questioning evil." In the case of Nietzsche, it was especially the distinction between the good/bad and good/evil contrasts which disclosed evil as "closely associated with *ressentiment*." In the case of Freud, the disclosure of unconscious or subconscious drives laid bare the profound "ambivalence" of the human psyche intimated by Schelling. Still more illuminating and intriguing

Footnote 21 continued
being." See his (1998, p. 133). However, Nancy's own account seems to endorse an empty decisionism where evil is no longer a perversion, and good and evil are equally free choices. Compare also Pryor in his (2005, pp. 226–233).

[22] Bernstein (2002, pp. 82–83, 90, 92, 249 note 8). Given that, following Schelling, Heidegger likewise seeks to overcome the rift between nature and spirit or between being and morality (or "is" and "ought"), it is strange that, at another point (p. 187), Bernstein agrees with Levinas and others to the effect that "there is no place for ethics in Heidegger's philosophy." However, in the absence of a neat golf between "is" and "ought," ethics clearly can no longer occupy a separate "place" from ontology. Heidegger' critique of the reduction of freedom to the "problem of free will" points in the same direction.

are Bernstein's references to the philosophical-theological writings of Hans Jonas, and especially the latter's speculations about a "*becoming* God" (clearly intimated in Schelling's treatise). As Bernstein observes, God for Jonas was a "suffering" and "caring" God, but also (and most of all) a "becoming God." In Jonas's own words: "It is a God emerging in time instead of possessing a completed being that remains identical with itself throughout eternity." In contrast to a certain Hellenic tradition which assigned priority to eternal being over becoming, Jonas privileged the temporal dimension, asserting that the concept of "divine becoming" can be better reconciled with the portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible where God is affected and indeed altered by what human beings do (to each other and to the world). What this view of God's dependence on humans—or of reciprocal dependence—implies is a revision of the conception of God as all-powerful or omnipotent (in the sense of worldly power). To quote Jonas again:

> But if God is to be intelligible in some manner and to some extent (and to this we must hold), then his goodness must be compatible with the existence of evil, and this it is only if he is not all-powerful. Only then can we uphold that he is intelligible and good, and there is yet evil in the world (Bernstein 2002, pp. 6, 95, 97, 196, 198).[23]

Politics and the "End to Evil"

The topic of evil is not confined to philosophy books but looms large in both personal and political life. The notion of the "reality" of evil—stressed in preceding discussions—points precisely to this ominous presence. The twentieth century and the beginning of our own amply testify to the destructive potency of evil in the world. And the end is by no means in sight. Steady advances in weapons technology herald breakthroughs to previously unfathomed levels of devastation. In the words of Lance Morrow: "The globalization, democratization, and miniaturization of the instruments of [mass] destruction (nuclear weapons or their diabolical chemical-biological step brothers) mean a quantum leap in the delivery systems of evil." In the new situation when virtually everyone—states as well as non-state actors—can acquire doomsday machines, destructiveness is both localized and globalized. Micro-evil and macro-evil, Morrow adds, come to achieve "an ominous reunion in any bid for the apocalyptic gesture. That is the real evil that is going around." Simple-minded naïveté surely is not the appropriate stance to adopt at this point. In fact, given the danger of global destruction, it may be "catastrophic not to think clearly about evil, not to be aware of what it is capable of doing (Morrow 2003, pp.5, 17)."

The question remains, however: what does it mean to "think clearly" about evil, both philosophically and politically? More specifically: what are the implications when "evil" is used as a political category? Recent history provides a pointer. As we all know, and as Morrow reminds as, President Bush soon after September 11 spoke of an "axis of evil" in application to some Islamic countries (plus North Korea)—a designation that was promptly reciprocated in some of these countries by talk about the "Satanic" West. In light of the above philosophical discussions, one may ask here: Which of the various "theories of evil" has the closest fit with this rhetoric? As it seems to me,

[23] The citations are taken from Jonas (1996). As one will note, Jonas privileges becoming over being, whereas Heidegger's reading reconciles becoming and being (or "being and time").

Manichaeism stands on the top of the list. As Morrow remarks: "George W. Bush and his critics use the word 'evil' in ways that suggest both sides are fighting the last war" (that is, Armageddon). The Manichaean streak is particularly pronounced in some American leaders. "President Bush," he continues, "uses the word in an aggressively in-your-face born-again manner that takes its resonance from a long Judeao-Christian tradition of radical evil embodied in heroically diabolical figures." Perhaps the closest parallel exists with some forms of radical Puritanism during the post-Reformation period. For Morrow, evil in Bush's usage has "the perverse prestige of John Milton's defiant Lucifer" where "evil emanates, implicitly, from a devilish intelligence with horns and a tail, an absolutely malevolent personality, God's rival in the cosmos, condemned to lose the fight (eventually), but nonetheless powerful in the world." Given the Manichaean imagery at work here, it is clear that there can be no truce or compromise in the ongoing struggle—seen as the "last war (Morrow 2003, pp. 15-16)." Susan Neiman reaches a similar conclusion on this point: "Each party to such conflicts insists with great conviction that its opponents' actions are truly evil (while its own are merely expedient)"; obviously, there can be "no end of misery as long as each side is certain that the other embodies evil at its core (Neiman 2004, p. XV)."[24]

As noted before, Manichaeism involves the struggle of absolutely good against absolutely evil forces; hence, the notion of an "axis of evil" depends on the assumption of radical goodness on the other side. Lance Morrow is again on target when he writes about this assumption: "An evil kind of innocence—the ignorant innocence of the powerful—runs through the American story and reasserts itself from time to time in a certain obliviousness in, for example, the area of foreign policy." This innocence is the result of a long history of isolationism and American "exceptionalism" spawning the image of the "city on a hill." Despite the horrendous treatment of native Americans, despite the experience of slavery, and even despite Hiroshima, this self-imagine persists. "Americans need to feel virtuous," Morrow states tersely, adding:

> The hardest possibility Americans have to confront about themselves is always the thought that they may be evil. That is the thing they find most difficult to face. If there comes a moment when John Wayne is evil, for example, the implications for Americans are intolerable; an entire edifice of American self-myth beings to disintegrate.

To be sure, a dose of realism persuades most Americans that some (seemingly) evil acts need to be done—precisely in order to maintain goodness and innocence. In this regard, political leaders are likely to speak of "permissible evil," that is, evil done for the sake of the greater good—a notion patterned on the view that God also allows evil (at least apparent evil) to occur in the world. At this juncture, Manichaeism slides over into theodicy, but a peculiar American-style theodicy. For, although God may permit evil to occur, Americans *grant themselves* the permission to commit evil acts—and, as Morrow observes, they have historically granted themselves "a considerable range of permissible evil (Morrow 2003, pp. 11, 131–132, 152)."[25]

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[24] As she adds tersely (p. xiv): "The Bush administration is busy making use of events that were undeniably evil to further partisan ends judged by much of the world to be a greater threat to a peaceful and just world order than any we have seen in decades. It's not the first time that 'evil' has been part of a war cry; but whether or not the administration achieves all its goals in doing so, it will remain a classic example of the politicization of evil for many years."

[25] As Morrow adds (pp. 152–153): "The American acceptance of permissible evil arises from the nation's immensely flattering conception of itself. Who is to blame a country of such virtue—divinely

Apart from involving a struggle of good and evil forces, Manichaeism also implies the notion of the ultimate victory of one side and the utter destruction or eradication of the other side. This aspect brings me back to the issue raised at the beginning of these pages: the issue of a termination of evil by political force as advocated by Frum and Perle in their book *An End to Evil.* As previously indicated, their book proposes a "winning" strategy: an all-out warfare against evil with the ultimate goal of victory. Americans, they write, are "fighting to win"; and although the goal may still be in he future, the "end to evil" will be "brought into being by American armed might and defended by American might (Frum and Perle 2003, pp. 9, 279)."[26] In terms of theories or conceptions of evil, this proposal clearly has a Manichaean cast, with some borrowings from theodicy—legacies which render it profoundly questionable if not pernicious. As an account of the role of evil in the world, Manichaeism has been emphatically denounced by philosophers and religious leaders at least since the time of St. Augustine; even moderate forms of metaphysical dualism have suffered a similar fate. Borrowings from theodicy do not help at all. At least since Auschwitz, theodicy-like arguments have lost most of their luster and appeal—and American-style theodicy is no exception. In the blunt words of Bernstein: "After Auschwitz, it is obscene to continue to speak of evil and suffering as something to be justified by, or reconciled with, a benevolent cosmological scheme" (which permits apparent evil to happen. Bernstein 2002, p. 229).

The proposal of a political or military "end to evil" becomes even more dubious when placed in the context of Schelling's nuanced conception of evil. As indicated before, the notions of good and evil in Schelling's thought are intimately linked with human freedom; in fact, freedom signifies precisely the possibility for good and evil. In light of these premises, extermination of evil by political or military force means also the termination of human freedom, including political freedom. This result—the conflation of "end to evil" and "end to freedom"—is a curious upshot of a strategy ostensibly aiming at the victory of "freedom" over non-freedom, that is, at the triumph of Western-style "enduring freedom" in the rest of the world. However, the defect of the proposal resides not only in its danger to freedom, but in its contamination of goodness with willful particularity—in this case, the particularity of "American military might." As will be recalled, evil in Schelling's account consists chiefly in self-glorification and the usurpation of "universal" goodness by particular self-will. Seen in this light, the triumph *over* evil through particular military might shades over into the triumph *of* evil. On this point, Slavoj Žižek in his commentary on Schelling offers some telling insights:

> "Evil" in its most elementary form is such a "short circuit" between the particular and the universal, such a presumption to believe that my words and deeds

Footnote 25 continued.
sponsored from its very origins—for certain inconsistencies and imperfections?... Who 'permits' permissible evil? In a nation sponsored by God, permissible evil means that no less an authority than God Himself permits it to be done—just as in the world at large, God who is all-good and all-powerful, permits evil to occur, creating in that apparent contradiction the conundrum of theodicy. George W. Bush's rationale for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 rested crucially on the argument that it was a necessary evil" or at least a "permissible evil—permissible meaning that the Americans gave themselves permission for it, drawing upon their immense resources of divine approval, the trust fund that God gave them when they started out."

[26] The concluding chapter in their book is titled "A War for Liberty," that is, liberty in the world at large.

are directly words and deeds of the big Other (nation, culture, state, God), a presumption which "inverts" the proper relationship between the particular and the universal: when I proclaim myself the immediate "functionary of humanity" (or nation or culture), I thereby effectively accomplish the exact opposite of what I claim to be doing—that is, I degrade the universal dimension to which I refer (humanity, nation, state) to my own particularly.... The more I refer to the universal in order to legitimate my acts, the more effectively I abase it to a means of my own self-assertion (Źiźek 1996, pp. 64–65).

In his study on *Radical Evil*, Richard Bernstein echoes Źiźek's comments, writing: "Evil turns out to be not particularity as such but its erroneous, 'perverted' unity with the universal: not 'egotism' as such, but egotism in the guise of its opposite (Bernstein 2002, p.91)."[27] With these words—one should note well—Bernstein does not mean to endorse evil, nor to deny that evil needs to be countered and combated wherever possible. The question is only how this should be done, or how we might contemplate an end to evil? My argument in these pages has been that this cannot be done along Manichaean lines through military might, that is, by arrogating to oneself all the goodness while assigning all the evil to one's opponents. If Manichaeism (together with theodicy) is put aside, then the struggle against evil can only be a *common* struggle, a struggle where all particularities combine in the search for goodness. A first step along this road has to be an admission by all parties of our failings and imperfections, shunning self-glorification of any kind. The next step has to be a sincere willingness, on the side of all parties, to set aside conceit in favor of the search of a shared "good life." For religious people—Christians and non-Christians alike—this search can only proceed with divine assistance or the help of divine grace. Yet, much room is also left for human effort and engagement, especially the fostering of good will through education and personal example. In terms of the notion of a "becoming God" formulated by Hans Jonas (but traceable to Schelling), God must assist humans in becoming properly human, while humans need to assist God to be properly God. Jonas quotes from the diaries of Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman from the Netherlands who perished in Auschwitz in 1943: "I will always endeavor to help God as well as I can.... With every heartbeat it becomes clearer to me that you cannot help us, but that we must help you and defend up to the last your dwelling within us."[28]

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[27] As he adds (p. 96): "Schelling's conception of evil as a 'spiritualized' assertion of a perverted self-will that glorifies itself, has delusion of omnipotence, and takes itself to be the expression of universal will is especially relevant for an understanding of twentieth-century totalitarianism and terrorism. Even in a post-totalitarian world, we witness the temptation of those who think that they can impose their particular self-will on others by claiming universality for it."

[28] Hillesum (1989); quoted in Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, p. 192, and in Bernstein (2002, p. 199).

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