

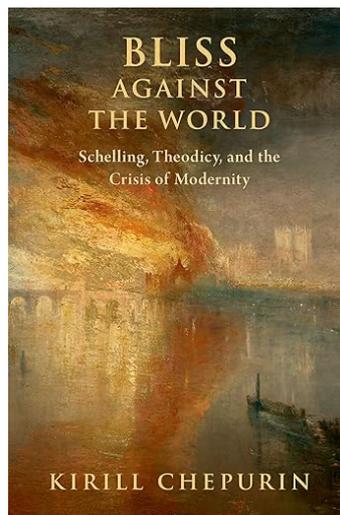
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Schelling on Trial

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1. Introduction: Challenging Schelling

All interpretive disagreements aside, readers agree that F. W. J. Schelling is a challenging thinker. Taken individually his works are difficult, and when taken as a whole they are even more so. Kirill Chepurin's *Bliss Against the World: Schelling, Theology, and the Crisis of Modernity* fully embraces this and is itself a challenging work in several senses. Not only does it challenge the reader to confront Schelling's writings as intentionally and unintentionally exemplifying a historical crisis lying deep at the heart of the modern world; it

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likewise challenges Schelling himself in his attempts to thematize a resolution to this crisis. Schelling's work, argues Chepurin, both arises from and stands in opposition to the historical and ultimately cosmic crisis of theodicy. Chepurin focuses on what he describes as the "antagonistic entanglement" (2) of Schelling's notion of bliss [*Seligkeit*] and his theorization of (and out of) the modern world. If Schelling is indeed a student of bliss, then he is simultaneously an engineer of the world's annihilation. Yet, as Chepurin argues, the way out of the world is not a simple matter throughout Schelling's thought. Schelling both challenges the world and its theodical structure, but his embeddedness in this very world in turn challenges him in his attempts to overcome it.

2. Bliss, Modernity, Self-Assertion

The interpretive difficulties that arise in relation to Schelling's project span from his own lifetime and persist equally in ours. Like diving in a cave, it is essential to find a guide line to which one can tether oneself. Bliss serves as Chepurin's guide line throughout *Bliss Against the World*, and rightfully so. Bliss is a particularly secure point of orientation because "the concept of bliss remains stable even as Schelling's concepts of freedom, identity, and the absolute undergo metaphysical shifts" (4). Importantly, bliss is related to these central Schellingian concepts of freedom, identity, and the absolute, yet "these other concepts are ultimately more limited than 'bliss'" (4). There is an immediacy to bliss, a kind of un-determining indeterminacy, which perpetually opposes it to the structures constitutive of the modern world: "In bliss" Chepurin explains, "all negativity and alienation, all imperatives of work and production, are dissolved into a state of absolute oneness, indifference, and non-relation" (6). Bliss, Chepurin will argue, harbors a kind of revolutionary energy situated within its utopic, spectral presence in any site of resistance to the world.

Unlike bliss, the world is characterized as a prison of negativity, relational opposition, and alienation. This form of the world, Chepurin argues, is thoroughly entangled in the "general Christian contradiction" succinctly understood as a "threefold structure of alienation between God, nature, and the human" (119). In chapter 1 Chepurin outlines how Schelling (along with Hegel) initially theorizes the crisis of modernity as an historical crisis arising from within Christianity's attempt to subdue Gnosticism, foreshadowing Hans Blumenberg's analysis of the modern age and its legiti-

macy.¹ “With Christianity” writes Chepurin, “an abyss is opened between the divine and the worldly, and so mediation – the stabilizing Christ-function – assumes the central place” (36). The structural need for mediation between the worldly and the divine entrenches division, alienation, and negativity at the core of the modern world. As Chepurin shows in Chapter 1, for Hegel and Schelling in their 1802 essay “On the Relation of the Philosophy of Nature to Philosophy in General” “modernity is *the* epoch of contradiction and *krisis*” (39). *Krisis* “is also a trial (*Gericht*) and a judgment (*Urteil*), in which the world is judged to be ungodly, alienated from God” (31). Significantly, to inhabit the *krisis* of modernity it to be constantly on trial, awaiting judgment and sentencing. The waiting here is essential, and this once again ties back to the conflict between Christianity and Gnosticism insofar as “in its opposition to apocalypticism and Gnosticism, Christianity made the move of postponing the end of the world” – the end of the trial – “making room for the world *in* its not-yetness” (33). Christianity, in its attempt to tame Gnostic apocalypticism, relies on a structure of deferral, of endless continuance, and perpetual delay.

The combination of the “not-yetness” of salvation and the inescapability of the world from within the world leads to a specific subjective constitution, one of demiurgic self-assertion thematized by Chepurin in Chapter 2. The demiurgic subject is always subjected to a demand from the world and this demand underlies the structure of modern freedom: “The freedom of the modern subject of self-assertion, as always subject *in* the world, is at the same time deeply unfree” writes Chepurin (79). Salvation is always temporally not-yet, and the burden of attaining the unattainable is embedded within the very structure of modern subjectivity. This pernicious combination only further entrenches the subject within the world’s structure of alienation. According to the logic of self-assertion, the absence of salvation and the ultimate justification of the world is *my* fault. If only I try harder, if only I toil further in the alienation of the world, perhaps the not-yet can become the now; if it does not, then I have failed. Through the demand of self-assertion, the world immanently recreates its constitutive structure of alienation. Chepurin ties this demand of self-assertion to what he calls “the fundamental ruse of theodicy”, namely “to make the subject spiritually invested in the way of the world and in working endlessly on the world, through the promise of fulfilment and bliss in the future” (16). This promise, Chepurin argues

¹ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).

throughout *Bliss Against the World*, is always broken – not contingently due to our individual failings but necessarily due to the structure of the world.

3. Cosmic Theodicy, Blissful Methodology

Whereas Chapter 1 and 2 outline the antagonistic relationship between bliss and the world as a historical problem as well as the demand of self-assertion that perpetuates the structural alienation of the world thereby foreclosing bliss, this final chapter of Part I reads Schelling's *Identitätsphilosophie* as an attempt to philosophize from bliss. The identity philosophy or philosophy of identity is one of the most complex and perplexing periods of Schelling's philosophical output. It stands between his early transcendental philosophy and *Naturphilosophie* on the one hand and his later philosophy of freedom and philosophy of revelation on the other. Chepurin argues that the identity philosophy works to resolve two interrelated issues. First "it must present an alternative to the modern standpoint of alienated thought, religion, and science, and to the modern primacy of dirempted subjectivity" (120). Secondly, "the identity philosophy must point a way beyond the structure of alienation, a way that would not simply reject but reconcile the modern world, incorporating into the standpoint of true philosophical science the central results of modern philosophy and individual sciences" (120). The identity philosophy is faced with two competing demands: to think the primacy of bliss while simultaneously incorporating the dirempted structure of the modern world within this arche-original bliss. This is, in short, an impossible task. "In the identity philosophy" Chepurin writes, "the All is immediately one with itself and absolutely blissful, even though what we perceive as finite things are not" (123). Here we see the tension that emerges within the identity philosophy. It begins with bliss insofar as in $A=A$ (the formal expression of identity with which Schelling begins his exposition) "there is no self-relation in the pure '='" (126). Because of the absence of self-relation, the "=" becomes the mark of bliss. Yet, and herein lies the problem, "there can thus be no science at the standpoint of bliss, and science is what Schelling wants to have" (128). So, though he begins with bliss, Schelling is once again drawn back into the world. The identity philosophy is still at pains to incorporate within this blissful unity the fractured structure of the world.

Significant in the relation between bliss and the world in the identity philosophy is the dependence of the latter on the former. Importantly, bliss is not understood as something that transcends the world. Because it begins with bliss, the non-relational "=" of $A=A$, the "dirempted world cannot

ground itself; it is needy, and dependent on the bliss that it forecloses and pulls apart” (129). Bliss is not “outside” of or transcendent to the world. Instead, Chepurin continues, “it is what underlies the world [...] Bliss persists *below* the imposition of the world and erupts materially *against* it” (146). However, despite beginning in bliss and acknowledging the blissful foundation of the world, the identity philosophy too falls victim to the theodical structure of the world outlined in Chapter 1. Consequently,

Schelling universalizes the constitutive tension between bliss (as world-annihilation) and theodicy (as world-justification), inscribing this tension into the heart not just of the Christian-modern trajectory, but of cosmic history as a whole (157).

Modernity is no longer simply a historical problem; its alienated structure has become the structure of the universe itself. The crisis is no longer merely historical; it has become cosmic. It is this cosmic crisis Schelling constructs and confronts in his post-1809 work.

Chapter 4 begins Chepurin’s exploration into Schelling’s post-1809 work with a discussion of the Fall. Schelling had long been interested in the narrative of the Fall, but following the 1804 *Philosophy and Religion* this narrative begins to take on renewed metaphysical significance. Like the identity philosophy, the story of the Fall begins as a story of bliss. “The paradisiacal state of the human is the primordial oneness (*Ur-Einheit*) and consciousness (*Urbewusstsein*), in which divine freedom or ‘eternal freedom’ rests in itself and the human rests at its center” (186). Consequently, in this condition “there is here no opposition of forces, only their perfect indistinction” (186). Like the $A=A$ that opens the identity philosophy, this paradisiacal state is one of bliss and without world. Because of the Fall from the Edenic paradise “human consciousness finds itself amid multiplicity, in a scattered postlapsarian state that is alien to the oneness that consciousness used to enjoy: in the first state of alienation” (189). This, of course, is the world. Schelling further argues that the individual retains a memory of and longing for lost bliss. The world works against this memory of lost bliss, and subjectivity remains within its demiurgic form dependent upon self-assertion. Following the expulsion from paradise Adam must *work*. As we have seen, this self-assertion perpetuates the world that forecloses bliss because “bliss is the eternal *now*, but one cannot attract or seize it, master or possess it without thereby foreclosing it” (197). Once again, Schelling finds himself writing of a trial, the cosmic trial of justifying the universe. What produces difficulty is that in this trial, Schelling serves as both prosecution and defense.

In the second part of Chapter 4, Chepurin outlines Schelling's philosophical method through which the promise of bliss is maintained. This presentation of the "fundamental operations" (202) of Schelling's philosophical method begins to reconcile the tension in the identity philosophy between bliss and the world. Even in the face of subjective self-assertion, Schelling attempts to hold onto the promise of bliss. Schelling deploys these philosophical operations to salvage bliss as theorized in the identity philosophy in light of this system's failure. In short, if the identity philosophy failed because it sought to see no evil, Schelling's post-1809 thought attempts to correct this error specifically.

Briefly, Chepurin outlines five stages in Schelling's philosophical method. There is something therapeutic about Chepurin's account insofar as the subject must undertake each of these operations to achieve the proper place through which philosophical construction can take place. The first operation is purification. However, this first operation is insufficient because for Schelling philosophy is "tied to the structure of twoness, since the possibility of the world is thinkable only through twoness, not oneness" (204). Philosophy and bliss are therefore non-identical, and to philosophize one must "maintain reflection even in the face of bliss" (204). The second and third operations are associated with self-emptying and self-sacrifice modeled by the figure of Christ. Through these operations, one enacts a process of "de-subjectivication" and a "giving up of self-assertion" (204). Chepurin continues "this double operation of self-emptying and self-sacrifice enacts the Pauline-Christian logic of diminution and restages the sacrificial kenosis of Christ in his choice to submit in death to the will of the Father" (205). These operations are ones of submission. This submission is also an operation of mediation insofar as "'Christ' names for Schelling the operation of *mediating what is fallen toward the higher, or toward the universal, through which fallenness is redeemed*" (207). In this Christian-theological structure, the promise of redemption is once again formulated as a "not-yet"; in short, the jury is still – and will forever remain – out. The fourth operation Chepurin names "polar construction". The first operation was characterized by the tension of bliss and twoness, the second and third by the submission of the lower to the higher, this fourth operation is characterized by a struggle between higher and lower. The lower has subordinated itself to the higher and this submission has generated an opposition. The fifth and final operation is anamnesis. As we have already seen, there is an anamnesis operative in the first operation of philosophy. It is through this moment of anamnesis that "the universe calls the human, and that which the philosopher enacts – again, as a prefiguration of the absolute state in which humanity will have re-

collected universal reality in bliss” (214). Through this analysis, we can see that the human begins in bliss, falls from this bliss, and subsequently works to reinstitute bliss as the universe.

This brings us to what I see as the most ambitious chapter of *Bliss Against the World* in which Chepurin reconstructs the cosmic trial that structures Schelling’s attempt to theorize the system of the world. If Chapter 3 presents Schelling’s first attempt at systematizing a metaphysics of bliss, Chapter 5 presents his second attempt, revised in light of the philosophical methodology outlined in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 Chepurin draws extensively upon Schelling’s 1821 Erlangen lectures titled *Initia philosophiae universae*. Turning to this understudied series of lectures allows Chepurin to reconstruct Schelling’s cosmic narrative from a novel perspective. These lectures develop upon the theodical trial of the *Freiheitsschrift* and the *Weltalter* project while transitioning to Schelling’s later project of positive philosophy. Chepurin initially describes this “universal history” as “a process of turning and re-turning, one that is at once circular and ascending, so that the *figure* of history is an ascending spiral of spirals” (220). The theme of ascension from lower to higher is important to keep in mind, and I will return to it shortly. Chepurin continues, noting that “the *rhythm* of this universal spiral” is

the two-part movement of Fall and redemption, in which fallenness is identified with opposing the higher or the divine, or asserting oneself *against* the higher, and redemption with kenosis as the Christ-operation of re-inversion, self-emptying, and free submission to the higher (220).

The philosophical method outlined in Chapter 4 sits firmly within this drama of Fall and redemption. Kenosis and renunciation are prerequisites for anamnesis and ascension. In Chapter 5 this dizzying spiral of ascension continues to be oriented around the promise of bliss. We again find Schelling struggling to reconcile bliss and the fallenness of the world. Further, we see how for Schelling, this spiral of spirals takes the form of a cosmic trial. Thus, even though it begins and ends in bliss, it simultaneously works against the appearance of bliss in the world. The world always posits bliss as a “then” or a “later” and never as a “now”.

In the post-1809 writings, Schelling holds true to his earlier Gnostic insight. “Since its inception, the world has been at war” writes Chepurin,

The universe that Schellingian God creates is disharmonious and unblissful, and in this continuing disharmony that the modern subject

continues to inhabit, we hear an echo of the cosmic war that made the universe the way it is (233).

Despite attempting to resolve the conflict that emerged in the identity philosophy, the tension between identity, individuality, and evil, this post-1809 cosmic drama is again framed by the trap of theodicy. Consequently, “due world-process must be upheld: this is the law” (241). Chepurin continues “the law ensures that everything is at once differentiated or brought to light, assigned its place, and subordinated to a higher movement” (250). The law ensures that everything remains in its proper place. Further, it mobilizes what is designated as lower in the service of what is designated as higher. This structure of division, segregation, and subordination is crucial for both the cosmic drama of Chapter 5 and the analysis of bliss and race in Chapter 6.

4. World, Race, Redemption

Chapter 6 forces us to consider the elements of Schelling’s philosophy that contemporary readers are likely to cast aside as an unfortunate residue of his time, namely his racism and his justification of enslavement and colonial expansion. Chepurin demonstrates how these elements are not ornamental flourishes that can be easily dismissed. Instead, they follow logically and necessarily from the core metaphysical and methodological commitments of Schelling’s philosophical project. The logic of the law and the subordination of the lower to the higher discussed above carries with it normative Anthropological consequences despite being couched in metaphysical and theological language. This chapter returns to a discussion that begins in Chapter 3 regarding Schelling’s comments on colonialism. “This cosmic viewpoint” writes Chepurin,

engenders Schelling’s *planetary and cosmic legitimation of the modern age*, including the colonial violence that is constitutive of global Western-centric modernity: specifically, the European conquest and extermination of the indigenous South American peoples who still worshiped the sun and were thus a scattered remnant of humanity’s solar past (150).

Importantly, Schelling is not simply acting as an apologist for the violent practices of colonialism. Instead, he inscribes these practices as a necessary component of humanity’s task: “For Schelling, even in its violent expansion, modernity is driven, consciously or not, by a higher mission: to unify humanity” (151). This is subsequently connected to the specifically Christian

character of Schelling's cosmic picture. Chepurin explains "humanity may be fragmented, yet these fragments must be reassembled into a oneness of consciousness and oneness of knowledge, and this is the Christian-modern mission" (152). The importance of this analysis is that it recognizes the *contingency* of Schelling's claims that Christianity provides the structure of intelligibility for world history.

Chepurin's intervention on this topic is timely and much needed. Many scholars of the late Schelling take for granted the historical process by which Christianity violently imposed itself upon the world. History was not Christian from the start; instead, Christianity – through conquest, colonial violence, and proselytizing thinly veiled as pedagogy – forced its ideology into the logic of history. Though proponents of Schelling's late philosophy emphasize its empirical, historical methodology, they often fail to consider this darker history of Christianity while simultaneously arguing for the universality of Trinitarian theology.² Chepurin provides a crucial correction to this naivety arguing that

the "re-" of the modern subject's re-assertion and recentering marks the colonial dimension of modern self-assertion as co-imbricated with Christianity, for it is Christianity that teaches the European subject to take its central place for granted as the divinely-guaranteed place of

² Take as an example Sean J. McGrath who writes "Schelling insists, in no uncertain terms, that Christianity is the true religion, the culmination of human religious history; that the essence of Christianity consists in the succession of theism by Trinitarianism; that the history of the Trinity is narrated, not deduced (even if anticipation of the logical structure of the Trinity is native to reason); that the narration is based on certain historical facts (the events recounted in the New Testament), which can be reasonably defended in a fully secular context; that the Trinity is the proper explication of the Christ event; and finally, and most importantly, that Christianity is not yet finished. As the future religion *par excellence*, Christianity will only be complete when the world becomes Church" (Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive*, (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 17). Here we see McGrath completely sidestepping the actual history of Christianity and the methods by which it became a global religious force, referring only to the narrative of the "events recounted" in the New Testament (a document of questionable historical accuracy in the first place). Further, we find him confirming in an affirmative tone precisely what Chepurin critiques in the Christian-modern grammar of the world: first, the drive to force the whole world to become Church, and second the deferral of the salvation that would follow this reconciliation. Schelling may insist upon this point, but why should its conclusion be immediately granted to him? The virtue of Chepurin's analysis is that it refuses to accept Schelling's claims as true on their face. Perhaps, as Chepurin argues, this insistence of Schelling's "in no uncertain terms" is actually a *problem* for Schelling and should be a problem for us as well. We do neither Schelling nor ourselves any favors by letting him off the hook on such important issues.

truth, salvation, and progress, no matter how “secularized” or “metaphorized” these categories become in modernity (303).

Chepurin connects this logic to Schelling’s idea that the higher develops out of the lower by enforcing its subordination outlined above, what he calls the due process of the world. The law of the world is itself racialized thereby justifying not only colonial expansion, oppression, and missionary violence but rendering it metaphysically necessary: “European colonialism and the hierarchized and racialized distribution of humanness are, in Schelling, conditions of possibility of the absolute future” Chepurin writes (317). Because the human posited as the summit of creation is the white, European, Christian man, all other forms of humanity must be mobilized via subordination in the service of universalizing this specific formation of humanity. Again, even in Schelling’s own thought the worldly operations of division, segregation, alienation, and domination overcloud the promise of bliss.

5. Gnostic Romanticism, Cosmic Pessimism

As Schelling was finishing his final lectures and the final days of his life, a new philosophical tradition was rising, namely the tradition of late 19th century German pessimism. Frederick C. Beiser, in his study of “*Weltschmerz*” or “world pain” explores the philosophical impact of “a mood of weariness or sadness about life arising from the acute awareness of evil and suffering.”³ Weariness, sadness, evil, and suffering are all central aspects of the grammar of the world described by Chepurin. Arthur Schopenhauer, the founding father of 19th century German pessimism, largely understood himself as resurrecting the “forgotten” dignity of Kant’s Critical philosophy, dismissing the immediate post-Kantians as obscurantist fabulists. For Schopenhauer, Schelling stands between Fichte (“the father of *sham philosophy*”) and Hegel (who appropriated Schelling’s Fichtean method into “real charlatanism”⁴). Obviously, Schelling’s cardinal sin according to Schopenhauer is the methodological fuel he provided for Hegel’s nonsensical fire. Schopenhauer’s well-documented dismissive attitude toward the post-Kantian philosophical tradition would seem to imply that there is little continuity between the idealists and romantics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries on the one hand and the pessimists of the second half of the 19th century on the other. However, if Chepurin’s narrative is correct,

³ Frederick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy 1860-1900*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 12-13.

Schopenhauer and the pessimists who followed in his wake can be understood as realizing (or at the very least continuing) Schelling's Gnostic vision while at the same time abandoning its countervailing worldly impulses. In other words, what differentiates Schelling from the *Weltschmerz* pessimists is his refusal to give up on bliss.

I will focus briefly on only one example, namely the largely forgotten Philipp Mainländer. Among the pessimists, Mainländer represents perhaps the most extreme spokesperson of the school's Gnostic impulses. *The Philosophy of Redemption* was his sole philosophical work and upon its publication he hanged himself at the age of 34. Therein Mainländer argues that "simple unity, God, fragmented itself into a world"; subsequently this simple unity "perished and disappeared entirely."⁵ Or, as he vividly puts it earlier in the text "God has died and His death was the life of the world."⁶ To translate this into Schelling's vocabulary, bliss is gone, and *this death of bliss* is why the world is as it is. Whereas Schelling seeks to keep hold of bliss in the face of the world, Mainländer jettisons divine unity and turns instead to nothingness writing "we gaze aghast or in profound satisfaction upon absolute nothingness, absolute emptiness."⁷ Bliss is gone, the world must go next and we along with it. For Mainländer, we must choose satisfaction over terror in the face of the absence of any alternative fate. The advantage of Mainländer's pessimistic-Gnostic metaphysics is that, though deeply pluralistic in his understanding of the independence of finite things, it is not at all dualistic when it comes to the world and the shattered unity from which it came. That unity is gone; it is only a memory and any recovery is ultimately a fantasy. As noted above, for Chepurin "bliss persists *below* the imposition of the world and erupts materially *against* it" (146) so the relation between bliss and world is not strictly speaking dualistic in a metaphysical sense, but there is a kind of logical dualism – or as Chepurin might put it a grammatical dualism – between the identity of bliss and the dialectical multiplicity of the world. The question, then, is if bliss itself is not just a fantasy, just another promise generated by the world-torn philosopher. Chepurin has argued convincingly that Schelling needs both bliss and the world, but do we?

Chepurin demonstrates elsewhere that the romantic tradition harbors within itself a conflict similar to Schelling's; on this point Schelling is an

⁵ Philipp Mainländer, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, trans. Christian Romuss (Brisbane City: Irukandji Press, 2024), 269.

⁶ Mainländer, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, 95 (italics removed).

⁷ Mainländer, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, 289.

example and not an exception.⁸ Further, for authors such as Mara van der Lugt, defining pessimism as the opposite of optimism overlooks the deeper significance of the tradition.⁹ She instead frames pessimism as a philosophical tradition attuned to the reality of suffering that provides a unique answer to questions of theodicy. She argues that the pessimist's orientation toward suffering does more than simply lead them to their dismissive views on existence as a whole. Centering suffering as a core aspect of human life provides an important ethical insight, and even a wellspring for ethical action as an attempt to reduce suffering. In this way, Schelling's theory of bliss fits squarely within the pessimistic tradition insofar as bliss is never a reward to be dispensed *after* one suffers the world's diremption, punishment, and evisceration. Schelling, as presented in *Bliss Against the World*, is also attuned to the problems of theodicy and the (universal) suffering *of* the world, yet it is unclear to what extent this *krisis* orients him toward the (particular) sufferings *in* the world, as shown by the discussion of race and colonialism in Chapter 6. Why does Schelling condemn the world in general as a prison of pain and alienation while at the same time mobilizing the sufferings of non-Christian, non-“Western” peoples in service of European salvation? One answer is that these positions are a result of the worldliness of Schelling's philosophy despite its attempt to thematize a cosmic vision of bliss.

As noted above, Chepurin frames Schelling as an explicitly *apocalyptic* thinker desiring the blissful annihilation of the world while simultaneously reinscribing the theory of bliss into the traps of theodicy understood as a structure of deferred judgment and delayed redemption. Schelling's idealism and romanticism harbor within them a darker thought insofar as they arise in response to, yet still remain symptomatic of a fundamental crisis embedded within the ontological structure of the Christian, modern world. This modern world is broken, and God stands over this broken world as both judge and jailer. God is not only the Lord of Being [*Herr des Seyns*], as the late Schelling argues; He is likewise Being's warden. This characterization of the world arises from within Schelling's own thought, but so too does the possibility of bliss. Yet, *Bliss Against the World* cannot accurately be described as an inherently pessimistic text. Chepurin highlights moments of bliss occurring throughout and despite the theodical foreclosure. He proposes the presence of a “*counter-tradition of bliss against the world*”, one that

⁸ See Kirill Chepurin “Romantic Bliss—or, Romanticism Is Not an Optimism”, *European Romantic Review* 32:5-6 (2021): 519-534.

⁹ Mara van der Lugt, *Dark Matters: Pessimism and the Problem of Suffering* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

non-hierarchically encompasses nomadism and mysticism, blackness and hidden divinity, magic and the mysteries, the bliss of laying on water and looking at the skies and that of the all-consuming revolutionary fire (340).

For example, Magic, is “the underside of modernity that modernity forecloses yet longs for” (56); nomadism “is thus a ‘wandering, roving,’ non-positional and nonproductive form of being that refuses all hierarchy or place” (336). The practices of magic and nomadism embody the refusal of bliss to bend to the laws of the world. Even in the cells of the pre-trial detention facility that is the world, bliss remains. It may be hidden, but it is still there. The conflict between bliss and the world is inescapable, providing both peril *and* promise. This, I would argue, is the optimism that remains within Schelling’s theorization of the cosmic trial as presented by *Bliss Against the World*. Judgment, as a structure of the world, may never arrive, yet bliss as an abolition of the world remains possible. In fact, the argument Chepurin so artfully frames goes further: bliss is a *necessary* condition for the world. The question, then, is if the possibility of bliss that stands against the world is another attempt to offer consolation in the face of suffering, failing to fully acknowledge the reality of individual sufferings that cannot, and ultimately should not, be sublated into a narrative of redemption. It is difficult to answer this question briefly, so I will leave it hanging.

6. Conclusion: Returning to Bliss

Bliss Against the World is a challenging and timely work. Most of this piece has focused on the challenges presented by Chepurin – both the challenges of Schelling’s philosophy and the challenges to which his philosophical project ought to be subjected. To end by foregrounding the work’s timeliness I want to close with the following: “Bliss” Chepurin writes, “does not judge: it cuts through, burns down, collapses, refuses, or simply does nothing in the face of the world’s imperatives of production and work” (341). Bliss cannot be “found” because it resides in no place, yet for the same reason it can never truly be lost. It cannot “save” *us* because it is never ours, but at the same time it is the world which makes us feel in need of salvation. Bliss is here, but we forget it when we remember only ourselves. It slips through our fingers when we believe it can be grasped through more vigorous acts of self-assertion. In these moments, it is difficult to think of anything we need more than bliss. In response, let us cut and burn, let us raze, and let us rest. Let us no longer be ourselves – let us simply do nothing. Then we can exhale, lay upon the waters, and possibly even leave the world behind.