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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

L'ÉNIGME DU MAL. ABORDAGES PHILOSOPHIQUES DEPUIS KANT

Introduction. Le mal après Kant <i>Martin Thibodeau et Joël Madore</i>	281
Evil and the Absolute. The Paradox of the Future in Schelling's <i>Freiheitsschrift</i> <i>James Sares</i>	287
Schelling, Theodicy and Evil <i>Bettina Bergo</i>	303
Absolute Evil. Reflections on Hegel's Philosophy <i>John W. Burbidge</i>	317
Hegel, Kant et le problème du mal <i>Martin Thibodeau</i>	325
Evil's Inscrutability in Arendt and Levinas <i>Imge Oranli</i>	341
La conception éthique et politique du mal chez Paul Ricoeur. Conséquences pratiques à l'aune du contexte contemporain <i>Gaëlle Fiasse</i>	363
Patways Across Darkness. Contemporary Evil and the Task of Philosophy <i>Francesca Brencio</i>	381
La volonté diabolique. Kant, Bizot et le Khmers rouges <i>Joël Madore</i>	393
«Evil Does Exist in the World» <i>André Duhamel</i>	407

RECENSIONS ET COMPTES RENDUS

Philosophie

- William E. MANN, *God, Modality, and Morality* (Donald McFarling) 423
Colbert RHODES (ed.), *Renewal: The Inclusion of Integralism and Moral Values into the Social Sciences* (Frederick Mattern) 427

Théologie

- Daniel MARGUERAT, *Les Actes des apôtres* (Vol. I-II); *L'historien de Dieu. Luc et les Actes des apôtres; Jésus et Matthieu. À la recherche du Jésus de l'histoire* (Michel Gourgues, o.p.) 431
Catherine VIALLE, Bénédicte DRAILLARD (dir.), *L'arbre* (Frédéric Tremblay) 433
Unn FALKEID, *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Pablo M. Iturrieta) 435

LIVRES REÇUS 437

TABLE DES MATIÈRES 2018 441

INTRODUCTION

LE MAL APRÈS KANT

MARTIN THIBODEAU
JOËL MADORE

Les neuf articles qui suivent présentent des versions révisées et augmentées de communications qui ont été prononcées dans le cadre d'un colloque international intitulé *Le problème du mal dans la philosophie européenne moderne et contemporaine* qui s'est tenu à l'Université Bishop's les 28 et 29 avril 2017¹. Comme son titre l'indique, ce colloque invitait des chercheurs et spécialistes à communiquer les résultats de leurs travaux sur différents thèmes liés au «problème» ou à la «problématique» du mal telle qu'elle s'est développée dans la philosophie européenne et «continentale» depuis le dix-huitième siècle jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

Une tension entre « optimisme » et « réalisme »

De façon plus précise, des spécialistes d'ici et d'ailleurs étaient conviés à partager leurs réflexions autour d'un enjeu central à partir duquel en est venu à s'articuler le problème du mal et qui est celui d'une contradiction ou, à tout le moins, d'une tension certaine entre, d'un côté, «l'optimisme» que partageaient

1. Nous souhaitons présenter nos plus sincères remerciements à l'Université Bishop's pour avoir accueilli ce colloque et pour avoir généreusement offert le support, financier et matériel, nécessaire à sa tenue. Nous voulons aussi exprimer toute notre gratitude à Messieurs Bruce Gilbert et Jamie Crooks, tous deux professeurs au Département de philosophie de l'Université Bishops, qui, lorsque nous leur avons fait part de notre désir d'organiser cet événement, l'ont immédiatement appuyé avec un enthousiasme contagieux. À cet égard, nous tenons à remercier tout particulièrement Jamie Crooks, qui, sans hésitation aucune, a accepté d'en assurer la direction. Son expérience, son savoir-faire, son empressement et son intelligence ont apporté une contribution tout aussi indispensable qu'inestimable à colloque. Par ailleurs, nous exprimons notre plus vive reconnaissance à Joël Madore, professeur à la Memorial University et participant à ce colloque, qui s'est joint à nous pour l'élaboration de cet ouvrage collectif et qui a su convaincre le comité éditorial de *Science et esprit* de l'accueillir en ses pages. Inutile de dire que, sans lui, cette publication n'aurait peut-être pas vu le jour ou aurait, à tout le moins, pris une forme bien différente. Enfin, nous remercions chaleureusement le comité éditorial de *Science et Esprit* de s'être rendu aux arguments de Joël Madore et de nous avoir ouvert généreusement ses pages en acceptant de publier cet ouvrage collectif.

et que partagent encore les défenseurs des idéaux issus des Lumières et ce qui, de l'autre, semble être la réalité, pour ainsi dire, irréductible et indépassable du mal, et ce, tant dans ses dimensions éthiques ou morales que politiques. Autrement dit, les développements, les avancées et les progrès souvent fulgurants des différentes sciences modernes, surtout depuis le dix-neuvième siècle, permettaient à plusieurs d'entretenir l'espoir que, sans pouvoir être complètement éradiqué, le mal trouverait néanmoins des explications de type sociologique, psychologique, voire neurologique et génétique, qui seraient porteuses de mesures susceptibles d'en atténuer de façon significative les douleurs et les souffrances. Or, la réalité, tant naturelle qu'humaine, semble plutôt montrer que le mal est extrêmement tenace, qu'il est enraciné profondément en l'être humain et que, par conséquent, l'espoir de le voir disparaître un jour, en totalité ou en partie, doit être, sinon tout simplement abandonné, du moins tempéré².

Kant et l'appart d'un éclairage nouveau

À cet égard, il y a un philosophe chez qui cette tension entre l'optimisme moral des Lumières et le fait apparemment irréductible du mal est apparue ou s'est révélée de façon particulièrement frappante. Ce philosophe est, bien sûr, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). En effet, en 1792, Kant fit paraître un essai intitulé *De l'immanence du mauvais principe au bon ou sur le mal radical dans la nature humaine*, essai qu'il reprit dans son opuscule *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison* et qu'il publia l'année suivante. Dans cet essai, Kant se penchait sur un thème qu'il avait certes abordé ici et là dans ses travaux antérieurs de philosophie morale, mais qu'il n'avait pas encore traité de façon systématique et exhaustive. Or, comme l'a justement rappelé Éric Weil, *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison* a, plus que tout autre œuvre de Kant, surpris, choqué, scandalisé les contemporains³ et tout porte à croire que c'est bien l'essai sur le mal radical qui fut la cause de cette onde de choc. De fait, les contemporains de Kant ne s'y sont pas trompés : cet essai, s'il ne marquait pas une rupture complète avec la philosophie morale que Kant avait développée précédemment, apportait du moins un éclairage nouveau qui contrastait avec l'optimisme moral que cette philosophie avait véhiculé jusque-là.

Ainsi, parmi les diverses réactions que suscita l'essai sur le mal radical, l'une des plus célèbres et, à vrai dire, l'une des plus tranchées, fut sans aucun doute celle de Goethe qui, dans une lettre à Herder, datée du 7 juin 1793,

2. Récemment, deux ouvrages ont abordé le thème du mal dans une perspective qui, à maints égards, recoupe la nôtre. Voir Susan NEIMAN, *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2002 ; Peter DEWS, *The Idea of Evil*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

3. Éric WEIL, *Problèmes kantiens*, Paris, Vrin, 1982, p. 143.

s'indignait en affirmant que « Kant, après avoir employé une longue vie d'homme à décrasser son manteau philosophique de toutes sortes de préjugés qui le souillaient, l'a ignominieusement sali de la tache honteuse du mal radical afin que les chrétiens, eux aussi, se sentent engagés à en baisser le bord⁴. » Quant à Herder, il abondait dans le même sens et soutenait que Kant dépeignait de l'être humain le portrait d'un être pécheur qui, à vrai dire, était encore plus sévère que celui des Écritures. De plus, Herder estimait qu'avec ce texte la philosophie de Kant aboutissait à un paradoxe étonnant, mais particulièrement révélateur, paradoxe que Jean-Louis Bruch a résumé en ces termes dans son ouvrage consacré à la philosophie religieuse de Kant :

C'est en élaborant une religion dans les limites de la simple raison que le philosophe découvre et postule en l'homme un mal irréductible à l'erreur, ou à l'entraînement de la sensibilité. Le mal radical, c'est le diable lui-même qui réside en nous, condamnant l'impératif moral à n'être qu'une loi purement formelle à laquelle la puissance radicale du mal ôte toute efficacité⁵.

Schiller, de son côté, eut certes une réaction plus modérée que celles de Goethe et de Herder, mais il n'en reste pas moins qu'il partageait leur réprobation et leur inquiétude en ceci, qu'à ses yeux, la théorie kantienne du mal radical semblait fournir une caution à l'orthodoxie chrétienne qui allait à l'encontre des fondements et des résultats les plus importants de sa philosophie morale⁶. En somme, chacun de ces auteurs estimait que la théorie kantienne du mal radical, sur laquelle s'ouvrait *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, marquait non seulement une rupture importante par rapport à l'optimisme moral des Lumières – dont la philosophie pratique de Kant s'était pourtant fait le porte-parole enthousiaste –, mais aussi en regard de la façon dont la question ou le problème du mal avait été pensé jusqu'à ce moment⁷.

Et effectivement, la théorie kantienne du mal se distingue de celles de ses prédécesseurs sur un certain nombre d'éléments importants. Tout d'abord, aux yeux de Kant, le mal ne peut aucunement être compris à l'aune d'une théodicee, à savoir d'une justice divine qui régirait le cours du monde et qui

4. Johann W. GOETHE, « Briefe an Herder v. 07.06.1793 », *Goethes Briefe*, Bd. 4, hrsg. von Philipp STEIN, Berlin, Reichsdruckerei, 1903, t. IV, p. 23. La traduction française de cette lettre que nous reproduisons ici se trouve dans l'ouvrage de Jean-Louis BRUCH, *La philosophie religieuse de Kant* (« Analyse et Raisons »), Paris, Aubier, Édition Montaigne, 1968. p. 75-76. Il est en ainsi du passage suivant qui est de la plume de Herder.

5. Johann G. HERDER, *Von Religion, Lehrmeinungen und Gebräuchen, Herders sämtliche Werke*, Bd. XX, hrsg. von Bernhard SUPHAN, Berlin, Weidemann, 1913, p. 222. Pour la traduction, voir la note précédente.

6. Friedrich SCHILLER, « Briefe an Körner v. 28.02.1793 », *Sammtliche Werke*, Bd. 10, hrsg. von Conrad HÖFER, Stuttgart, Cotta, 1983, p. 289.

7. À propos de la réception de l'essai sur le mal radical chez les contemporains de Kant, voir également Christoph SCHULTE, *Radikale Böse. Die Karriere des Bosen von Kant bis Nietzsche*, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1991, p. 26-27.

assignerait au mal son sens et sa justification. Pour Kant, le concept même de théodicée s'avère être illégitime puisqu'il fait appel à une «réalité» ou à une «instance» – l'idée d'un Dieu ou d'une sagesse suprême comme cause finale du monde – qui excède les capacités cognitives de la raison humaine⁸. Le mal, soutient-il, est bien le fait de l'action humaine et c'est en regard des ressorts qui sont propres à un tel agir qu'il doit être pensé. De plus, contrairement à ce que soutiennent les représentants d'une tradition qui remonte à Plotin et à Augustin, le mal, selon Kant, n'est pas un *privatio boni*, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne se définit pas comme un «manque», une «absence» ou, plus justement, comme une «privation» de bien. Pour Kant, au contraire, le mal possède bel et bien une réalité qui peut être qualifiée de «positive» et qui s'oppose à la réalité tout aussi «positive» du bien⁹. Par ailleurs – et en opposition également à ce que défendaient plusieurs de ses prédecesseurs –, le mal, soutient Kant, n'a pas son origine dans nos désirs, nos inclinations ou notre sensibilité, mais il a plutôt sa source dans la volonté ou, plus exactement, dans le libre-arbitre humain lui-même. De façon un peu plus précise, le mal, affirme-t-il, est enraciné dans un «penchant» (*ein Hang*) inscrit au cœur de la nature humaine, dont les fondements sont assurément «insondables» (*unerforschlich*), et auquel le libre arbitre humain peut obéir¹⁰. Aussi est-ce en ce sens que, pour Kant, le mal est «radical»¹¹. En somme, l'être humain, soutient-il, choisit librement de faire le mal et c'est précisément la raison pour laquelle il lui est entièrement imputable et qu'il en est le seul responsable.

Kant et après Kant

Tels sont certains des principaux éléments de la théorie du mal radical que Kant exposa dans la première section de son essai sur la religion et qui frappèrent ses contemporains. Aussi sont-ce ces mêmes éléments qui formèrent le

8. En 1791, soit deux ans avant la publication de *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, Kant fit paraître un article intitulé *Sur l'insuccès de toutes les tentatives philosophiques en matière de théodicée* dans lequel il analysait et récusait cette notion de théodicée en s'appuyant sur les résultats de sa philosophie critique: cf. Immanuel KANT, «Sur l'insuccès de toutes tentatives philosophiques en matière de théodicée», *Oeuvres philosophiques*, t. II, trad. par Alexis PHILONENKO, Paris, Gallimard, coll. La Pléiade, p. 1393-1413.

9. Dans son ouvrage *Kant et le problème du mal*, O. Reboul montre que Kant a tout d'abord élaboré sa conception du mal comme ayant une réalité positive dans un essai datant de sa période pré-critique, qu'il rédigea en 1763 et qu'il intitula *Essai pour introduire en philosophie le concept de grandeurs négative*. Cf. Olivier REBOUL, *Kant et le problème du mal*, Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1971, p. 48-61.

10. Immanuel KANT, «La religion dans les limites de la simple raison», *Oeuvres philosophiques* (coll. La Pléiade), t. III, trad. par Alexis PHILONENKO, Paris, Gallimard, p. 43.

11. À propos de l'utilisation par Kant des termes de «radical», de «racine» et d'autres métaphores botaniques pour parler de l'origine ou de la source du mal, voir l'article de Claude Piché, «L'enracinement du mal dans la subjectivité chez Kant, dans Monique CASTILLO (dir.), *Criticisme et religion*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004, p. 49-71.

noyau autour duquel des philosophes tels que Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche et, plus récemment, Arendt, Levinas, Jaspers et Ricoeur développèrent leur conception respective du mal. Ce sont également ces éléments qui sont au cœur des articles qui suivent.

*Bishop's University Memorial University
et Université Saint-Paul*

**EVIL AND THE ABSOLUTE.
The Paradox of the Future in Schelling's
*Freiheitsschrift***

JAMES SARES

The reception of Schelling today as the great thinker contra Hegelian absolutism, the great celebrator of the contingency of existence over the logical necessity of essence, the thinker of the open future and creativity of philosophical thinking – this reception has yet to acknowledge the greatest innovation and paradox of Schelling's philosophy: that the Absolute must be thought of as a *life* with a *destiny* yet unrealized. As early as Plotinus, eternity has been grasped as a simultaneously whole life; with the Christian reception of Neoplatonism, this life becomes an active procession of Son from Father, with Spirit uniting both; only with Schelling does this active life become a *destiny* structured around the eternally active temporalities of past, present, and future. Through the eternal temporalities, Schelling reconciles human freedom for good and evil with a systematic metaphysics that leaves nothing outside of this differentiated eternal life; as explained below, this dynamics enables Schelling to assert the omnibenevolence of God's will alongside the free *moral decision* of humanity for good and evil, for a will that either uses its individuality to embody a universal love or encloses itself in a selfish and destructive egoism. While God Himself does not will the evil made possible by human freedom, the possibility of the freely chosen good, and thus the very purpose of revelation, is inextricably tied therewith. Evil is justified only so long as it is reduced to the temporary means for this good and is ultimately overcome *tout court* – lest it eternally persist alongside or even outweigh the good itself in contradiction to God's omnibenevolence. Yet, the paradox of the *Freiheitsschrift* of 1809 is that the final purpose of this divine life – the raising of the good to an everlasting unity with God and the casting of evil to eternal nothingness¹ – is a transformation of eternity that 'is' not yet. The promise for the realization of this transformation grants reality of evil in the present

1. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, tr. Jeff LOVE and Johannes SCHMIDT, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2006, p. 68. Henceforth EF.

as the index of the incompleteness of destiny and its annihilation in the fulfillment of a destiny only through which the Absolute, as an omnibenevolent God, might be conceived as a *life* at all: "All life has a destiny, and is subject to suffering and becoming."²

As I explain in this essay, the fulfillment of divine destiny, as a condition of this life, necessitates the paradoxical – indeed inconceivable – dissolution of the *eternal* 'past' through which both God's love and creation might emerge at all in their eternal presence/existence.³ This eternal past engenders the possibility of evil but is required for the 'becoming' or development of both creation and God's own life *and thus the good of both as such*. Thus, although the question of the future has been almost completely ignored in the critical reception of Schelling's freedom essay, I claim that it is the specter haunting Schelling's philosophical project, caught between the demand for divine completion through which his systematic metaphysics gains meaning *as an omnibenevolent life* that promises the triumph of the good and the inability for this systematic metaphysics to realize this destiny intelligibly or coherently within the system that Schelling posits. If Schelling's system is given meaning in view of the future, if the present condition of a suffering humanity and the reality of evil might be understood only in the future abolition of both conditions, the irreducible paradox of the future brings Schelling's project into crisis or systematic 'excess' as its necessary fundament.

I claim that the paradox of the future must be understood in connection to the tension between Schelling's attempt to construct a logically rigorous reconciliation of freedom and system and the increasing turn to historical events as 'proving' the omnibenevolent divinity of the Absolute in what ultimately becomes 'positive philosophy.' The reconciliation of system and freedom would be incomprehensible for Schelling outside of the concrete historical moment of Christ, whose revelation both makes conscious the moral freedom of humanity for good and evil and promises of the ultimate abolition of evil. If the realization of Schelling's future cannot be known or derived from any logical necessity, Schelling nonetheless calls it a "moral necessity" *contained immanently in the system itself*,⁴ revealed in the living spirit of Christ to which history bears witness. Nevertheless, reason must continue to adhere to a rigorous conception of these terms so as not to regress to dogmatic, pre-Kantian metaphysics. Thus, the tension in Schelling's philosophical commitments is clarified when brought into conversation with Kant's philosophical dowry and the drive to overcome the limitations of transcendental philosophy. Underscoring the relationship between history and the eternal principles of the Absolute as the crux of concern, I organize this essay into two sections:

2. *EF*, p. 66.

3. *EF*, p. 42.

4. *EF*, p. 61.

first, I provide an overview of Schelling's systematic metaphysics that *explains* and *derives* the decision for good and evil from the eternal principles of the Absolute; second, I clarify the relation between destiny and evil to explain the paradox of the future, borne from Schelling's post-Kantian explanation of the expression of eternity in time, including humanity's freely chosen 'transcendental act' for good and evil.

Metaphysical Science as Divine Life

As late as the *Identitätsphilosophie*, Schelling's philosophy might be considered, as Michael Vater claims, a Kantian metaphysics that respects the inapplicability of the categories of the understanding beyond experience.⁵ Yet, by the time of the freedom essay, Schelling places greater focus on explaining the relationship between the Absolute and creation, which requires application of the concepts of causality and substance to the Absolute itself. Retrospectively in his lectures on the history of philosophy, Schelling launches several critiques that explain this abandoning of the Kantian limitation of metaphysics, including the claim that the critique of cognition is a critique of knowing of knowing, which should go on to infinite regress,⁶ that the analogical use of the categories to describe the Ideas of reason in their practical validity violates their supposedly *a priori* status anyway,⁷ and that Kant does not *prove*, but merely *assumes*, that we cannot apply the categories of the understanding to the supersensible. Most importantly, Schelling claims that Kant abandons the demand of philosophy to explain the genesis of nature and to elucidate the concepts of God, freedom, and the soul because he fails to recognize the limited applicability of his critique to metaphysics outside of the subjective rationalist tradition of Wolff and Baumgarten.⁸ While recognizing the validity of his rejection of the traditional proofs of God, Schelling claims that the Kantian critique "does not affect Spinoza" and other metaphysical systems that reflect the development of its own object rather than applies external predicates to a subject.⁹ Leaving aside possible defenses of Kant on each of these points, Schelling takes it that a systematic metaphysics remains possible so long as it unfolds the contents of the Absolute through its own immanent determinations. Schelling's defense of Spinoza against claims of pantheism on the principle that a system is a relation of *antecedens* to *consequens* rather than an immediate identity of God with finite things, underscores one aspect of this

5. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *Bruno, or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things*, tr. Michael VATER, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 1984, p. 73.

6. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, tr. Andrew BOWIE, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 98.

7. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 104.

8. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 103.

9. *Ibid.*

self-development; Schelling's critique of Spinoza for failing to recognize that this relationship does not abolish the freedom of what is dependent, underscores the other.

As Schelling constructs his philosophical system, he attempts to reconcile the critical dowry of Kant and the unkantian view that reason is animated not by its own contents but rather the concrete events of historical revelation. Despite the theosophical influences of Böhme and the mystical language present in the freedom essay, Schelling neither regresses to "the methodological stupor of dogmatism"¹⁰ nor asserts an indefensible account of the Absolute through immediate intuition. While Schelling at times appeals to the 'depths' of the human soul as intuitively 'conscientious' [*mitwissenschaftlich*] of the Absolute,¹¹ he is surprisingly close to Hegel in claiming that reason must demonstrate and justify metaphysical science, lest the contents of this intuition remain abstract, merely subjective, and thus contingent. Thus, in one sense, Andrew Bowie is right that Schelling's system does not require "belief in God in the dogmatic sense";¹² yet, against Bowie, neither is Schelling's philosophy reducible to an abstract investigation of the disclosure of Being in the Heideggerian sense. The very principles of the Absolute, *revealed* as an omnibenevolent *God*, come to take on meaning disclosed historically – not as dogmatic belief but as a treatment of Christian revelation as the unfolding a spiritual content to be grasped scientifically as the reconciliation of freedom and system. That is, the highest expression of philosophy, as a 'system of freedom' that does justice both to human freedom and a grounding Absolute philosophical principle, is made conceivable (and 'provable') by an *historical* content. By the time of freedom essay, Schelling's system must be understood as the effort to *explain* and *derive* the principles of reality from the Absolute itself. Writing retrospectively of his philosophical method by the time of the *Naturphilosophie*, Schelling asserts that metaphysical principles must either be proven in reality or have an expression in reality.¹³ Perhaps most importantly, Schelling's freedom essay gives a nascent account of what he later calls a 'metaphysical empiricism' that takes the concrete reality of spiritual events, including revelation and freedom of other subjects, as observable factual events that require an explanation through the principles of the Absolute as well.

The freedom essay is not Schelling's definitive metaphysical science nor should it be taken as a fully consistent work, but it does express certain prin-

10. Christopher LAUER, *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling*, New York NY, Continuum, 2010, p. 137.

11. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *The Ages of the World*, tr. Jason WIRTH, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2000, p. xxxvi. Jason Wirth emphasizes that this 'conscientiousness' implies not only consciousness but also a moral conscience.

12. Andrew BOWIE, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 95.

13. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 118.

ciples and structures of his thought that underscore the fundamental tensions in this method. Rather than provide an exhaustive and idiosyncratic account of the metaphysical system of the freedom essay, which remains rife with interpretative ambiguities, it is productive to ruminate on how certain logical principles come to take on content divined from historical revelation. For instance, the *Ungrund*, which is later supplanted by the ‘unprethinkable’ Being or *prius* of ‘positive philosophy,’ expresses Schelling’s adherence to the idea that Being is the first principle of metaphysical science from which thinking derives and on which it reflects. Following Hölderlin in “Being and Judgment,” Schelling takes it that Being must be presupposed as Absolute because all thinking (alongside all finite existence) is marked by a relativism or schism of subject and object and thus lacks the necessary unity of a first principle. The need of thinking for the copula indicates a prior unity of Being through which a relation between subject and predicate can be established at all or through which knowledge can recognize *itself* as limited.¹⁴ In the freedom essay and more explicitly in the *Weltalter*, the *Ungrund* becomes an ‘abyss’ of will/freedom that freely bestows actuality on a series of ‘potencies,’ each a causal principle in the creation of the world. The Absolute ‘contains’ or develops its own immanent self-revelation as an omnibenevolent living spirit *through* these potencies; by choosing ‘Yes’ to revelation and creation, the *Ungrund* is revealed to have always already been the ‘goodness’ of God’s free will. Leaving aside complications to his often changing account (for instance, in the *Weltalter*, each potency contains all three potencies in a distinct hierarchy), the eternal yearning for existence, or the ‘ground,’ is the real principle or material cause; the ‘light’ or ‘Word’ of God is the ideal, formal cause with the power to subordinate this *chora*-like matter; spirit, as *actus purus* or the loving will for creation,¹⁵ stands over and unifies these two potencies, subordinating the ground to the Word, selfhood to love, and acting as teleological and efficient cause.

While this structure may appear to be a piece of “empty speculation,” Jerry Day rightly emphasizes that, across Schelling’s works, “the potencies of the divine are ostensibly discovered in human experience.”¹⁶ The importance of the historical revelation of Christ, rather than an abstract ‘disclosure of Being,’ is nowhere clearer than on this point: because God reveals Himself/His will in history as *living spirit*, the Absolute contains the same potencies exhibited in human spirit and natural life more generally. Schelling can hope to obviate

14. Andrew BOWIE, *Schelling*, p. 159.

15. In the freedom essay, Schelling claims that God Himself transforms with this revelation, thus ‘completing’ Himself through revelation; yet, in later formulations, he understands this not as a transformation of unprethinkable Being itself (since it lacks nothing) but as the revelation of its *will* for creation.

16. Jerry DAY, *Voegelein, Schelling, and the Philosophy of Historical Existence*, Columbia MO and London, University of Missouri Press, 2003, p. 141.

the critique that he projects principles of experience and finite life onto the structure of a supersensible cause only because he takes this cause as itself having authorized such a projection by revealing its affinity with creation. Thus, with some significant modifications, Schelling transposes the structure of reality he outlines in the *Naturphilosophie*, which unfolds the creative tension in all of life between ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ principles, on the Absolute. While critics including Hegel take Schelling’s philosophy of nature to be a prefigured logical structure imposed abstractly and contingently on the world rather than truly derived from it, Schelling claims that these same principles are expressed distinctly at each stage of inorganic, organic and spiritual life, with all things in existence expressing a ‘real’ being-in-itself or materiality and an ‘ideal’ expression and development, culminating in human knowing and history. Full investigation into the various expression of these principles would require extensively more space, though Schelling works from the general notion that any revelation or expression of existence cannot take place without a ground or selfhood that is initially enclosed, while the ‘real’ principle requires the expansive moment of ideality in order to *reveal itself at all*, to express or ‘disclose’ itself. The creative tension between them generates and develops life.

Schelling describes the potencies in the paradoxical language of eternal temporality, most notably calling the ‘yearning for existence’ or ground the ‘eternal past’ from which spirit – suffering to overcome the dominance of the real principle – frees itself as the eternally present and teleological ‘to come.’ As opposed to a temporal passing away of one moment into the next, eternal temporalization signifies not that there was the eternal past before there emerged eternal spirit but instead organizes these potencies in relations of grounding and mutual activity that are ‘always already.’ As Schelling writes, the ground and spirit are “two equally eternal beginnings of self-revelation,” each having no actuality without the other.¹⁷ In divine spirit, the union of real and ideal principles is asymmetrical, the ideal having preponderance over the real by reducing it to a mere non-active grounding for the revelation of His omnibenevolent existence/Word. Yet, as ‘eternal’ principles constituting this very identity, these potencies must remain eternally active and distinct from their equally eternal moment of union. Hence, this account of eternity allows Schelling to assert that God’s spirit is omnibenevolent, willing only love and unity between real and ideal principles, yet that it also requires a grounding principle ‘prior’ to its eternal presence (and without positing a strict dualism precisely because this is His *own* past in which He yearns to give birth to Himself as spirit/will). Schelling explains that the loving will of spirit, which as self-dispossessing lacks being-in-itself, would have no selfhood on which

17. *EF*, p. 59.

its actuality could be grounded without the eternal activity of the ground.¹⁸ Despite not being actively or specifically willed by God, this ground must remain independent, lest there be no true distinction in spiritual life between the forces of selfhood and love. Without this active principle *from which to emerge as its own past*, spirit would not undergo a ‘becoming’ or ‘suffering’ constitutive of life and the merely ‘potential’ ground of yearning would not truly be its own principle, reducing spirit to an undifferentiated, lifeless infinite without *telos*. In other words, without the active real principle, it would lack the creative tension constitutive of life itself.

Schelling’s concept of destiny is also explained in relation to the temporalization of eternity constitutive of a differentiated life. Using the language of divine destiny, Schelling explains why spirit and the ground, as different eternal temporalities, interact at all for the eternal creation of nature and finite spirit. As Schelling describes, creation is guided not by a lifeless logical or conceptual necessity but rather a divine will to inform the ground with *logos* as a teleological cause.¹⁹ Schelling’s metaphysical science, as a divine life, is driven by a *moral* necessity that contains in it the “concept of revelation as a conscious and morally free act.”²⁰ God’s freedom is a moral necessity not in the sense of an external compulsion but rather a fulfillment of an omnibenevolent essence, not in the sense of a logical requirement but rather a free disclosure of love. Most importantly, the concept of destiny unfolds the contents of this moral necessity through which God reveals Himself as a *living*, loving Absolute; without this moral necessity, the Absolute would not have the qualities of omnibenevolence and a desire to reveal a freely chosen good in creation and, ultimately, to abolish evil. To realize divine destiny, spirit reveals itself to “what is like [God], free beings acting on their own”²¹ and thus capable of realizing the good alongside evil – a possibility unintended by omnibenevolent spirit yet ultimately necessary to reveal the good – as *consequens* of the Absolute. As revealed by Christ, the final purpose of creation, and thus the destined life of God, is to cast out the freely chosen evil of human spirit into total non-being. As White claims, Schelling ultimately waffles on whether God’s destiny is one that He must fulfill for His *own* sake (to know Himself in self-reflection) or whether he does it for the sake of creation itself (since the abyss of freedom ‘needs’ nothing);²² regardless of this ambiguity, however, the *act* of God’s self-revelation, and thus the *life* of this *actualized* spirit/will, is ‘incomplete’ without the fulfillment of this destiny.

18. *EF*, p. 70.

19. *EF*, p. 61.

20. *EF*, p. 60.

21. *EF*, p. 18.

22. Alan WHITE, *Schelling: Introduction to the System of Freedom*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1983, p. 176.

The question of creation and its relationship to the eternal interactions of the potencies brings to bear what Schelling himself considers the most important yet most difficult and obscure point of the freedom essay. Although he leaves this point unspecified in the freedom essay itself, in *Bruno*, *Clara*, and *Philosophy and Religion* and resonating even with his later work, Schelling claims that the realm of time comes about with the ‘falling’ of creation from eternity due to the egoism of humanity. I take this as Schelling’s attempt to overcome Kant in *explaining* and *deriving* the existence of a temporal world in which transcendental human freedom is expressed. While resulting in a temporal and spatialized world, the ‘fall’ does not imply that eternal creation is itself destroyed (since, as eternal it is ‘always already’); instead, taking human freedom as coherent only *transcendentally*, Schelling indicates that the eternal expresses itself in time as that which always already is and must be. From eternity and as expressed in time, all of creation comes about between the opposing forces of ideality and reality, between the revelation of reality by ideality and the active resistance of reality, as a progressive unfolding of increasing complexity. Adhering to the principle that any attempt to identify being with thinking creates a ‘remainder’ that cannot be captured fully by *logos*, the active principle of the ground becomes a *resistance* or irreducibility to the universalizing ideality of the Word.²³ Schelling thus explains and derives the principles of creation by claiming that all life exhibits the tension between this irreducibly real principle and the ideal principle through which it expresses its existence. Unlike the rest of nature, which exhibits these principles in a lower ‘potency,’ human spirit experiences them as an opposition or full separation that is ultimately subject to the *eternally* free and conscious decision for good and evil. Only this free decision, in relation to the possibility of evil, realizes divine destiny to unite with a freely chosen goodness/love to which it is the *antecedens*.

Yet, precisely because this reunion relies on the abolition of the eternal yearning of the ground since it engenders the eternal possibility of evil, Schelling’s system is mired in paradox. How can a life proclaim the abolition of the very condition by which it lives? Having described Schelling’s metaphysical science as a divine life, it is necessary to consider how the problem of evil reveals crisis and contradiction engendered between the rigor of metaphysical science and the facticity of historical and spiritual revelation.

The Transcendental Act

The influence of transcendental philosophy on Schelling’s system is nowhere clearer than in his discussion of the human freedom for good and evil. For

23. *EF*, p. 47.

Schelling, Kant's greatest discovery is that the intelligible being of humanity is outside or above all time and thus never determined by it; following Kant, if humanity were *merely* temporal, freedom would be inconceivable insofar as its actions and (coming to) being would be determined by 'empirical,' causal relations to other temporal beings. Thus, humanity's freedom precedes time "not so much temporally as conceptually, as an absolute unity that must always already exist fully and complete so that particular action or determination may be possible in it."²⁴ Yet, for Schelling, Kant leaves unexplained *how* a moral decision for good or evil is made atemporally and expressed in time. Schelling critiques Kant for having recognized the freedom of the human being as "a subjective ground of human actions preceding every act apparent to the senses"²⁵ but not having risen to a coherent account of the transcendental nature of this decision. Kant leaves unexplained how a non-temporal decision for good or evil might be made *qua* empirical subject lacking any capacity to transform the will or cognize the depths of the noumenal soul. At once, the empirical subject knows the moral law as it appears for its realization in time and yet cannot know the moral constitution of the soul itself; the Kantian noumenal soul cannot be known theoretically and thus its constitution is somehow inferred in the activities of the world that cannot, however, be given as proof or knowledge of the moral constitution of the soul. Perhaps most problematic in Kant's account is the inconceivable notion that empirical actions may hope to transform an atemporal will, a will that is always already as it is, as the determining ground of the empirical itself.²⁶ For Schelling, this claim is antithetical to the idea of transcendental human freedom, leading him to posit the *transcendental act* from eternity. Following Fichte more than Kant on this point, the transcendental act is a kind of 'predestination' in the sense that the actions of humanity "[do] not become, just as [humanity itself] does not become as moral beings, but rather it is eternal by nature," from the free decision for good and evil as one's own essence as finite spirit.²⁷ The actions of individuals are not arbitrary or contingent but rather in accordance with a will and disposition [*Gesinnung*] that has always already been decided from eternity.

Hence, in the wake of Kant, the construction of a 'system of freedom' that *explains* transcendental freedom rather than merely posits it requires an account of how and why the moral law appears to us as *eternal* beings and *how* this eternal decision is expressed in empirical actions. As Schelling writes,

24. *EF*, p. 49.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Immanuel KANT, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, tr. George di GIOVANNI, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 6:48.

27. Bernard FREYBERG, *Schelling's Dialogical Freedom Essay*, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2008, p. 72.

the free decision for good and evil might emerge only through a suffering for existence experienced by finite spirit. While good and evil are ‘positive’ principle of free decision rather than the ‘lack’ of finitude *per se* (as nothing else in nature rises to moral understanding), the possibility of this decision emerges only with the suffering of spirit in its finitude. Against Dale Snow, the human being is not, for Schelling, ‘grounded in itself’ or ‘self-positing,’ even if the essence of humanity is its own free deed and independent of determination by other created beings.²⁸ To invoke Heidegger, the freedom of humanity is instead a *predicate* of the freedom of the Absolute itself, meaning that the condition of existence is always *outside* of finite creation. In contrast to God’s “eternal joy of overcoming”²⁹ His own eternal past of yearning, that is emerging from His own past to unite the real and ideal principles in their proper hierarchy, finite spirit suffers an indelible sadness that “clings to all finite life,” given that human selfhood “can never rise to full actuality [*zum Aktus*]” in the sense of this necessary yet free self-identity in self-differentiation.³⁰ Whereas God’s will/spirit is a selfhood precisely through the universality of His love, the sadness of finitude must be understood as the fear of the ‘consuming fire’ of love that abolishes individuality for its self-dispossessing universality. As such, finite spirit is initially opposed to self-dispossession and clings instead to its own particularity in the drive to posit itself as absolute in its own inward subjectivity and to use the Word of reason for the benefit of its own enclosed egoism. Against Manichaeism, evil is not its own ‘fundamental being’ [*Grundwesen*]³¹ existing co-eternally with the principle of the good (and thus eternally outside of the systematic Absolute), nor is the will of the ground, in its active resistance to *logos*, *in itself* evil. Evil is rather a parasitic inversion of the relationship between the ‘contractive’ craving for existence, or the egoism of personality, and the universal self-dispossession of love. In history, this may be expressed as the valorization of egoistic benefit, the attempted mastery of other spirits by absolutizing the particularity of one’s own will, failure to conform to universalizable maxims,³² and evasion from freedom by unthinkingly submitting oneself to the particular wills of others as their instrument.

Schelling commends Kant for recognizing radical evil from mere empirical observation (rather than systematic *deduction*), writing that it is even remarkable that he ascends to this knowledge.³³ Yet, it remains unclear in the text, and in the secondary literature, to what extent Schelling considers the initial

28. Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 1996, p. 169.

29. *EF*, p. 62.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *EF*, p. 73.

32. *EF*, p. 43.

33. *EF*, p. 53.

suffering state of human spirit a ‘radical evil’ in the sense of a *transparently* free act. While Schelling leaves ambiguous whether or how finite spirit might itself be understood in terms of eternal temporalities, he draws a comparison between this state of finite spirit and the eternal past of God/spirit, in which a ‘seed’ of light is present in the ground yet not fully realized as full understanding.³⁴ Even by the late *Philosophy of Mythology*, Schelling wavers between attributing guilt and innocence to the Fall, as “our ancestors had no knowledge of differences between which they could have chosen freely.”³⁵ However, this does not prohibit the attribution of the egoism of evil to human spirit’s original condition. Schelling goes so far to claim that it is only from this initial condition of ‘darkness’ can “the good as light can be developed,”³⁶ thus implying that a free decision for evil and good is realizable only after passing from this initial state of spiritual suffering. Following Kant once more, only with the help of divine assistance or grace, a transformation [*Transmutation*] may occur from all eternity, bringing human spirit to full understanding of good and evil and allowing spirit to overcome its initial existential suffering if it so freely chooses. With this, Schelling provides a theodical justification for radical evil as the necessary state of suffering prior to the raising of the good to consciousness; without the possibility of evil coming from the active resistance of the ground, “the good [would have remained] hidden together with evil,”³⁷ thus failing to realize the moral necessity of God’s omnibenevolent life and, in a sense, giving victory to evil.

Lest this conception of evil be accused once more of ‘empty speculation,’ the principle guiding his metaphysical project in general – that the principles of eternity unfold in time and become the contents of history – apply here as well. Against the dominant materialist historical paradigms of today, Schelling relies on a reading of history that takes historical progress as driven by spiritual evolutions and events rather than material developments transformations. While Schelling’s reading of history remains open to the charge that he absolutizes only one, contingent historical narrative culminating in the revelation of Christ, he claims that without this moment, “all of history would be incomprehensible,”³⁸ given that the philosophical reconciliation of freedom and system is possible only as such. What, then, is this (spuriously interpreted) historical content? Not only as individuals but also as a *species*, human spirit is faced with the existential suffering of finitude from eternity, expressed in the historical passage through suffering, its means in *sin* and its end in *death*. In his description of the epochal unfolding of history, Schelling emphasizes

34. *EF*, p. 32.

35. Jerry DAY, *Voegelin, Schelling, and the Philosophy of Historical Existence*, 145.

36. *EF*, p. 54.

37. *EF*, p. 67.

38. *EF*, p. 66.

that the spirit of love appears only after an era of ‘unconsciousness’ of good and evil; before the historical revelation of Christ, humanity has no knowledge of good and evil but only of the God yearning to give birth to Himself, a primeval time [*Urzeit*] in which the spirit of love has yet to be revealed.³⁹ A conflict is then declared between good and evil with the revelation of Christ, which brings humanity to full consciousness of this difference and the promise of an eventual overcoming of evil by good. In turn, the phenomena of sin, suffering, and death become for Schelling a ‘general necessity’ for “the actual extinction of particularity through which all human will as a fire must cross in order to be purified.”⁴⁰ All of humanity must pass through the ‘evils’ of sin, suffering, and death – called the ‘enemies’ of Christ to be abolished⁴¹ – in order to accept a self-dispossessing, loving union with God; all of humanity expresses egoism, laziness, the privileging of particularity over universal interest, or violent impulses for mastery to some degree, though only some ultimately overcome these moral failings. Even those who choose the good from eternity must suffer the historical expression of this passage from egoism as they are ‘purified’ of their ‘radical evil’ and enact their freedom on and through the rest of creation; death is the only means for full absolution from undergoing or perpetuating suffering in the material world (even without evil intention), necessarily divided and internally conflicted for the very reason that it is ‘fallen.’⁴²

Yet, Schelling leaves the relationship between history and eternity impenetrably obscure and never fully coherent, never mind changing between texts. In the freedom essay itself, it is unclear whether these concrete actions and interactions amongst and between finite spirits and nature are always already determined as much as the ‘transcendental act’ – that is, whether these beings stand in a *logical* relation to each other from eternity that is merely spatialized and temporalized with the Fall – or whether the realm of time engenders new and unforeseen interactions and forces. The former option would make eternal creation a fully transcendental condition of history in the vein of Fichte and, arguably, would follow certain Spinozistic elements of the *Identitätsphilosophie*. The temporal world would thus be ‘determined’ in accordance with relations that include the freedom of human spirit. Nevertheless, Schelling also appears at times to treat history as a means for a transformation of eternity itself,

39. *EF*, p. 46.

40. *EF*, p. 48.

41. *EF*, p. 68.

42. Schelling indicates in such texts as *Clara* (1810) a belief in the spectral afterlife, however, given that few ‘good’ spirits are fully purified by the time of death and must continue their efforts until entering into a purified ‘spirit world’ (also subject to temporal change thus the Fall/incompleteness of eternity). Moreover, evil spirits exhibit an intractable desire to maintain materiality or are internally conflicted and suffering unceasingly after death. Schelling does not explain what happens to the spirits that lived before Christ.

motioning toward the good/purified soul's return to and reunion with the Absolute after death under a higher perfection than before,⁴³ as is the case in *Philosophy and Religion*. Schelling must argue either that eternity is always already complete, which he denies through the language of divine destiny and *cannot* affirm because the 'fallen' world is a marker of its unfulfillment and the continued presence of evil from eternity, or else claim that 'fallen' creation somehow—impossibly—is the catalyst of the transformation or fulfillment of eternity into that which it is *not yet*. Leaving aside the problem of time transforming eternity itself (a reproduction of Kantian aporia), it is inconceivable how the principles of eternity could transform into what they are not 'always already.' Perhaps Schelling attempts to evade this immanent paradox by characterizing the problem of evil as "merely temporal."⁴⁴ Yet, in reducing evil to a mere accident of time, Schelling contradicts his own conception of evil as possible only through the structure of eternity itself, as the expression of an *eternal decision*.

As such, the solution to reconciling the reality of evil with the 'revealed' Word of God – that divine life has a destiny to abolish evil *from eternity* – engenders paradox that must be examined. While the good emerges only from the purification of the original principle of evil, this bringing forth of the good also preserves evil as a principle *alongside* the free choice for good, even being the 'past' condition of good spirits themselves. The 'enemies' of Christ, the suffering and destruction brought forth from the free decision for evil, are irreducible to their value as a pyre through which the good might emerge. They also indicate the real decision for evil, an eternal rejection of the universality of God's love and an eternal spiritual suffering externalized as a destructive force in history, a breaking forth of the chaos of the ground. As Schelling warns, evil annihilates "the bond of creaturely existence"⁴⁵ in striving to become creaturely, thus paradoxically threatening to destroy the principles of creation, much as a disease or parasite does to the body. For this reason, numerous commentators, including Heidegger⁴⁶ and Žižek,⁴⁷ have questioned whether the transcendental act for evil indexes a rupture, the excess of human freedom to God's divinity, an irreducible non-identity haunting Schelling's systematic metaphysics in its power of annihilation. Yet, to emphasize once more, Schelling evades Manichaeism to claim that even evil is 'within' the life of God understood as God the *antecedens* to the *consequens* of human freedom. The destructive forces of humanity, committed against natural and

43. *EF*, p. 67.

44. *EF*, p. 65.

45. *EF*, p. 55.

46. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, tr. Joan STAMBAUGH, Athens OH, University of Ohio Press, 1985, p. 161.

47. Slavoj ŽIŽEK, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, London, Verso, 2007, p. 63.

spiritual being alike, are always already contained in the system by being grounded in the principles of eternal potencies in a relationship of *antecedens* to *consequens*. Against Heidegger, the problem of evil is not a problem for the formal *system* or the *abstract* disclosure of Being because the Absolute could contain even the most egregious historical atrocities *in principle*.

Instead, the real problem of evil comes about when this system is a *divine life* structured as a moral necessity to abolish evil. Evil becomes wholly reducible to its role of revealing of the good only in view of the destined victory of the good in the future overcoming of this evil, in the dissolution of the active force of yearning that recoils from the will of love. Without the redemptive promise of Christ to defeat evil, the good might just as well serve to bring to full consciousness evil itself, to grant evil a place from eternity, to fail to bring divine life to completion. Accordingly, it would come into question whether the revelation of the good is truly justified in view of the evil it unleashes, whether the Absolute would have any realizable purpose constitutive of life as such, and whether the theodical motivation of Schelling's project – to reconcile God's omnibenevolent life with humanity's freedom for evil – is tenable. Thus, we must consider what it means that paradox lurks behind, or rather as, the promise of Christ.

Conclusion: The Paradox of the Future

Schelling discusses the end of evil as the 'final crisis' of a system moving toward the "final separation of good from evil."⁴⁸ He writes that this separation signals the *abolishment* of the eternal yearning of the ground, such that it is neither active nor independent, unable to step out of potentiality, and thus unable to realize the inversion of eternal principles in the moral *decision* of humanity. Yet, the dissolution of the active and independent ground is the dissolution of the suffering condition through which God grounds both His own spirit/will and creation itself. Any narrative of eternal progression to the fulfillment of destiny must be grounded in a past that is supposed to be abolished by that which it eternally grounds. If the eternal future is ushered with God's decision to transform the structure of relation with the eternal past, this intervention would remain an eternal moment realizing the transformation of the past 'after' the past, possible only because the past was, and always already was, preserved 'before' this transformation; alternatively, if the eternal future is precisely always *future* as an eternal condition of unrealizability as presence, the eternal past remains as what is always already 'before.' God's life would be either that which cannot be completed, in a perpetual state of coming to be its eternal future yet never actualizing, or else the destiny of God is precisely that the

48. *EF*, p. 67.

future that must remain eternally ‘to come’ and thus never realize the abolition of evil from *all* of eternity. In any attempt at systematic intelligibility, the incompleteness of divine destiny would be the condition through which the completion of destiny might be conceived. The future is what must be posited to the present as its meaning-giving *telos* yet is proscribed from materializing without annihilating the very system to which it appears.

Against Tyler Tritten’s interpretation of Schelling’s *later* philosophy, the question of “whether or not the Good could be completely actualized, completely present”⁴⁹ emerges not from a contingency of God’s will but rather the ‘moral necessity’ of divine life itself. An immanent critique of Schelling’s system reveals its fundamental condition as the paradoxical necessity of the future as contradicting the life it is tasked with fulfilling. The future is what *must arrive* yet *cannot conceivably arrive* in order for Schelling’s metaphysical science to be the divine life that any post-Kantian system must be. At once, then, the future must be posited within this system and also, within this very positing, is never fully contained by it. As Schelling claims in the *Weltalter*, the future frustrates any attempt to be ‘narrated,’ ‘discerned’ or ‘presented’ systematically, even as it must be grasped within the system as its very condition of intelligibility. It is not a mere defect of the soul’s capacity for knowledge but rather the nature of eternity itself that the future be disclosed as an invocation, a prophesy, without which the past and the present would be given no retrospective meaning.⁵⁰ In other words, it is the very nature of the future to elude logical anticipation or derivation, to frustrate systematic intelligibility in its imperative to arrive. Thus, it is necessary to understand Schelling’s system in terms of a destiny whose fulfillment is mired in paradox yet capable of being posited only as such: the meaning of the present must be posited only through the continued absence of what has been divined as the imperative realization of divine destiny.

I leave open whether this conception is merely an illicit attempt to obviate critique for the inconsistencies of Schelling’s method and thus attempt to answer the problem of evil. It is, at least, insufficient to resolve the concerns one ought to have approaching Schelling’s system. As receptors of Schelling’s work, we must recognize his metaphysical science as operating through this paradox: to deny either the realization of this destiny or its inconceivability is to deflate the paradox through which his very system lives. The renunciation of the utopian future in the disavowal of faith in Christ’s revelation, now common for readers of Schelling, annihilates the condition of divine life in turning away from Schelling’s insight that a true system must express a destiny. Yet, if Schelling’s project is to be understood as an overcoming of Kantian aporia,

49. Tyler TRITTEN, *Beyond Presence: The Late F. W. J. Schelling’s Criticism of Metaphysics*, Boston MA, De Gruyter, 2012, p. 343.

50. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *Ages of the World*, p. xxv.

what might it mean that we end with the same unverifiable hope or idea for a utopia that (possibly) cannot be realized, or at least cannot conceivably be so? Might Schelling's overcoming of Kant be evidenced only by a future we are endlessly awaiting? And might this awaiting lead us to nothing but the apocalyptic destruction of the good against which we prophesize? These questions persist not only in the freedom essay but also through the positive philosophy, evidencing a recurrent tension in Schelling's method between the rigor of logical structure and the facticity of spiritual life. Against the triumphant pathos with which Schelling proclaims the certainty of the fulfillment of divine life, we confront a living system of contradictory demands that produce the life it brings into crisis. Perhaps being a Schellingean today means only to speak back to a divine promise and question: *Will the future ever arrive?*

*Department of Philosophy
Stony Brook University,
Stony Brook, NY*

SOMMAIRE

Cet essai scrute le *Freiheitsschrift* de Schelling (1809) en tant qu'il tente de réconcilier la bonté absolue de Dieu avec la réalité (dite positive) du mal moral au sein de l'humanité. Schelling entreprend cette réconciliation à travers une métaphysique dont le fondement est la vie divine douée de temporalités éternelles. Néanmoins, cette réconciliation s'empêtre elle-même dans des paradoxes autour de la question concernant la possibilité de réduire le mal au bien puisque le premier pourrait être surmonté par le second. Afin d'examiner cette question, je vais d'abord rendre compte du «système de la liberté» dont Schelling est l'auteur, puisqu'il implique la structure de l'Absolu. Puis j'examinerai la question de la liberté humaine transcendante dont la structure de l'Absolu fournit le principe. Que la fin du mal doive arriver à l'avenir même si elle reste inconcevable conduira l'analyse de Schelling à une crise systématique.

SUMMARY

This essay examines Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* (1809) as a post-Kantian attempt to reconcile the omnibenevolence of God and the 'positive' reality of moral evil in humanity. Schelling undertakes this reconciliation through a metaphysics based on a divine life with eternal temporalities. Yet, this reconciliation is mired in paradox over whether evil is ultimately surmountable and thus reducible to the good. To examine this question, I first give account Schelling's 'system of freedom' as it involves the structure of the Absolute. I then examine the question of transcendental human freedom grounded in this structure. I claim that it is the problem of the future end of evil that must arrive yet cannot conceivably do so that brings Schelling's account to systematic crisis.

SCHELLING, THEODICY AND EVIL

BETTINA BERGO

1. The reality of evil: Schelling's transformation of Idealism

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

To demonstrate that there are but two means for explaining evil – the dualistic, according to which an evil ground-being with modifications supposed as much beneath as beside the good; and the Kabbalistic, according to which evil is explained through emanation or contraction, and that thereby every other system must sublimate evil – [to demonstrate this] would require nothing less than the entire power of a [...] fundamentally expanded philosophy. (SW VII, 411)¹

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

Now, given the formalism Schelling denounced in what he calls Spinoza’s “realism,” given the abstractness of Leibniz’s theodicy (SW VII, 356); indeed given the formalist assumption of an absolute knowledge that crosses through and guides Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Schelling drops the remark I quoted in the beginning, toward the end of his *Inquiries*, like an avowal or a justification. Arguably, he is less dualistic than bi-une and processual. Indeed, the ultimate

1. See Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph SCHELLING, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. VII, ed. Fritz von SCHELLING (Stuttgart, Cotta’scher Verlag, 1855-1861). Hereafter abbreviated in the text as SW, with volume number followed by page number. As Schelling writes in his 1809 *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*: “So um zu beweisen, daß es nur zwei Erklärungsarten des Bösen gebe – die dualistische, nach welcher ein böses Grundwesen, gleichviel mit welchen Modifikationen unter oder neben dem guten, angenommen wird, und die kabbalistische, nach welcher das Böse durch Emanation und Entfernung erklärt wird – und daß deshalb jedes andere System den Unterschied von Gut und Böse aufheben müsse; [...] würde nichts weniger als die ganze Macht einer [...] gründlich ausgebildeten Philosophie erfordert.” For the English, see the James GUTMANN translation (Chicago, Open Court Classics, 2003), abbreviated henceforth as PINF.

unification of his two originary principles in the *Ungrund*² seems more speculative still than the original birth of intelligibility, *das Wort*, out of the two fundamental principles themselves. As we know, Schelling is indebted to the Christian cabballism he learned from the 17th century mystic, Jacob Böhme (1572-1624). But he is clear: to provide an account of the reality of evil able to rival, or parallel Kabbalism “would require nothing less than the entire power of a fundamentally expanded philosophy.” This is because, beginning with the Greeks, evil was conceived *eo ipso* in privative, rather than living, or substantive, terms.

Schelling’s quest for a *gründlich ausgebildete* philosophy unfolded over three decades during which the changes he introduced into his terminology all strove arguably to reach the positive philosophy beyond criticism and dialectics. We see one germinal line of it worked out in the *Inquiries into Human Freedom*. I must apologize to the Schellingians here for what will be a fairly superficial discussion of those *Inquiries*. I was invited to present on Levinas, proposed Schelling instead, so I will present on the curious impact of Schelling on Levinas. Let me then review the meaning of evil in the birth of intelligibility out of the conjoined but disparate first principles in the *Inquiries*.

In the context of the debate over Spinozism, Schelling echoed Jacobi’s conviction that the Spinoza reception had reified human freedom and the proposition that all things are in God into a higher-order mechanics, but that the actual intent of Spinozism might be recovered through a finer understanding of participation, predication, whose logic focused on the relationship between the antecedent and the consequent (SW VII, 342): “if, for example, proposition is advanced that the Perfect is the Imperfect, it signifies: the Imperfect exists not by means of those attributes in and through which it is Imperfect, but by means of the perfection which it contains” (SW VII, 341). Schelling argued further, “The profound logic of the Ancients distinguished subject and predicate as the antecedent and the consequent [...] and thus expressed the real meaning of the law of identity [of beings and God, beings in God]. Even a tautological statement,” he added, “if it is not to be altogether meaningless, retains this relationship” (SW VII, 342). In short, that there might be freedom *and* evil “in God” need neither vitiate evil nor deny freedom as such. Manfred Frank has reminded us that Schelling here returned the logic of identity he learned from Gottfried Ploucquet, such that every being contains within it something ostensibly other than it, which indeed it may become. That is, an A, conceived within this dynamic, modalizing logic, is both itself and what it may become: Aa and Ab. In other words, A° or A in its ‘originary state,’ contains *not so much* a and b qua predicates but qua modes by which A raises

2. “...es muß vor allem Grund und vor allem Existierenden, also überhaupt vor aller Dualität, ein Wesen sein; wie können wir es anders nennen als den Urgrund oder vielmehr *Ungrund*?” (SW VII, p. 406).

itself in its becoming to a higher power of itself, or A². This resurrection of a logic known to Leibniz and abandoned after Wolff,³ admits more than the two above mentioned modalizations, there might be an infinity of them. In this respect, to understand nature, or freedom, as “in” God, does not mean to localize them in God like qualities or predicates, so much as to understand that through some power of God they have their being.⁴ Properly understood, Spinoza’s divinity should neither deny freedom (SW VII, 345), nor should his pantheism sublimate individuality. However, for this, Spinoza’s God had to be explicitly set forth as living, since what is not living would not admit such modalizations. A living God, then, is primordial being, and “Will is primordial Being” (SW VII, 350). As we know, then, rather than a lifeless pantheism, Schelling executes his “pistol shot”-birth of the absolute, by offering a ‘narrative’ of the emergence of God from God’s self.

2. The birth of God, out of ‘God’

Werner Marx has urged that we consider Schelling’s ‘God’ as essentially the universe, and we might add, as ‘what-is’⁵. That ‘God’ be living, then, requires that it be born, which in turn invites us to conceive of something in God that both is and is not God (SW VII, 359). Recurring to the Ploucquet’s logic of *reduplicatio*, Schelling identified this in 1809 as God’s *Basis*. He wrote

As there is nothing before or outside of God, he must contain within himself the ground of his existence. All philosophies say this, but they speak of this ground as a mere concept without making it something real and actual [*etwas Reelles und Wirkliches*]. This ground of his existence, which God contains, is not God viewed as absolute, that is, insofar as he exists. For it is only the *Basis* of his existence, He is *nature* [*der Grund seiner Existenz, Er ist die Natur*] [...] inseparable

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

4. “If we let infinite Substance = A, and infinite Substance regarded in one of its consequences = A/a; than that which is positive in A/a is indeed A. But it does not follow on this account that A/a = A, i.e., that infinite Substance regarded in its consequences is to be considered exactly the same as infinite Substance as such. Or [...] it does not follow that A/a is not a distinctive and particular substance, even though it be a consequence of A.” (SW VII, p. 344)

5. Werner MARX, *The Philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling: History, System, and Freedom*, trans. Thomas NENON, Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 61: “At the same time, divine Being is the ‘Universe,’ ‘absolute totality’ (SW IV 128–29), and contains nature and the finite intellect as forces within itself. All the finite and singular beings, the plurality, are thus simultaneously real and ideal within this unity of a qualitative identity.”

from him [...] but nevertheless distinguishable from him [*unabtrennliches, aber doch unterschiedenes Wesen*]. (SW VII, 358)

Now, the inseparable *Grund* of God does not really precede God qua personality or qua livingness (neither chronologically, nor logically). Schelling sets a kind of *époque* on the coordinates of inner-outer, before-and-after, urging: “God contains himself in an inner basis of his existence, which [...] precedes him as to his existence, but similarly God is prior to the basis as this basis [...] could not be if God did not exist in actuality” (SW VII, 358).

This argument is crucial because it will ultimately justify humans’ *being* in God *and* their freedom to commit evil acts – and we may legitimately describe the birth of the God-personality from the God-Basis without fearing our recourse to fables *or* analogy because, precisely, we are ourselves one aspect of the absolute, of “God.”⁶ The relationship between these aspects of the absolute is simultaneously in-different – there is no *tertium comparationis* by which to define their difference – *and* tensed. Existing in the most amorphous sense, they co-exist *as* God, inseparably yet without the interaction or possible reciprocation precursive to a dialectics of becoming (as in Hegel’s initial and purely formal of being and nothing in the Logic). At this “virtual” degree of coming-into-being, then, we may focus on either one of the two “equally eternal beginnings of self-revelation” (SW VII, 395). From the point of view of their tensed co-existence, “the first beginning of creation is the longing [*Sehnsucht*] of the One to give birth to itself, or the will of the depths” (“*es sei die Sehnsucht, die das ewige Eine empfindet*”). Through the same will, modalized now as love, arises an incipient coherence and intelligibility that Schelling calls *das Wort* – principle of personality and spirit.

The unfolding of the two *Wille*, that of the “middle nature like desire or passion” and that which is “altogether free and conscious” (SW VII, 395), crosses through all becoming. The unfolding “vitalizes” Spinozistic necessity by thinking a living unconscious and by urging that the “geometric reasoning which has ruled so long” coexist with the passionnal and the spiritual, Schelling writes of the “irrational” relationship (*irrationale Verhältnis*) between nature and reason (SW VII, 395). This uni-dualism of principles – which for Schelling is also a return to what was best in Leibniz; viz., “laws of nature [that] are

6. In his essay, “La naissance angoissée de l’Absolu: autour des *Recherches sur l’essence de la liberté humaine et des Âges du monde* de Schelling,” Étienne Pelletier (Université de Montréal) cites Augustin Dumont on *Die Weltalter* “[L]’acte philosophique de dire le développement temporel de l’absolu, c’est-à-dire de le raconter, n’est que l’explication à soi de cet absolu, mais cette explication doit être elle-même ‘naturante.’ Le récit inévitablement humain du passé de l’absolu est donc sommé d’être, à l’instar de l’absolu, naturant et créateur.” See Pelletier in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 73 (2017), and Augustin DUMONT, “Le langage du temps,” *Methodos* [online], 14 (2014).

morally [i.e., practically] necessary" (SW VII, 396)⁷ – the uni-dualism of the principles at the birth of God from itself is thus found in animals and humans alike.⁸ Schelling offers the image of light emerging from obscure gravity, a figure so vivid that it was lost neither on Gilles Deleuze nor on Slavoj Žižek, albeit for quite different ends. We will see why it is also important to note that the modalization of the will of love as *das Wort* is indebted to Kabbalism flowing through Philo into Abulafia's ecstatic mysticism – in short, the famous Jew-Greek that is also Greek-Jew.⁹ No doubt Christian adaptations of Kabbalah, like Jacob Böhme's, confronted the further task of a triune god without "emanation" or *sephirot*. But I am anticipating my discussion of Levinas.¹⁰

3. The common origin of nature and history

In the cosmic genealogy, nature emerges with the birth of light, albeit never losing the dark principle from which the light was raised (SW VII, 377); at a higher degree, however, the same biune principle gives rise to spirit, which Schelling aligns with the realm of history (SW VII, 377-378). A common matrix thus guides the unfolding of history and nature. But within the realm of spirit, the dark principle moves through passion as an excitation or emotion (*Erregung*), seeking to move itself from the neutral core (*Zentrum*) of the being to its periphery. Whilst in animals the two principles remain in balance, in humans there arises a choice or possibility: to enact the will of the depths or to incarnate the will of love. "Indeed the dark ground operates incessantly in individual man too, and rouses egotism and a particularised will just in order that the will of love may arise in contrast to it" (SW VII, 381). Particularisation thus emerges from the interaction of the two wills, though it is *Angst* in man that drives him "out of the center (*Zentrum*) in which he was created" (SW VII, 381). This illustrates what has been deemed the emanationism in Schelling's logic,¹¹ though he rejects Neo-Platonism as unable to account for evil and freedom.

7. For a discussion of Leibniz on evil, see SW VII, p. 369; also pp. 366-367 on evil as "positive perversion," and the note from the *Morgenblatt* (1807), SW VII, p. 267.

8. See SW VII, p. 365 for the dissolution of the two principles in man.

9. Moshe IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia and Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Facsimile Publisher, 2016), p. 57. Schelling's claim that "even he who has moved out of the center retains the *feeling that he has been all things when in and with God*" (SW VII, p. 390) rings like the direct up take of Abulafia's *Devekuth* or *unio mystica* with God. In Judaism, as in Christianity, it is, of course, antinomian.

10. There are thus two creations, one of spirit (man), the other of nature; see Moshe IDEL, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 377.

11. Schelling reminds his readers that St. Augustine criticized emanationism as unable to explain the origin of man from the substance of God. Nothing comes from God but God; the corruptibility and essential lack in humans is explained by their being created *ex nihilo*. For Schelling, however, the nothing in question should well be the *question* for us. "Augustinus sagt gegen die Emanation: aus Gottes Substanz könne nichts hervorgehen denn Gott; darum sei die

Be that as it may, we see the tension between his struggle to preserve the importance of individual actions and the power of the will of love to reconcile and unify. This is what I am calling the impossible theodicy. Indeed, the echoes of this extraordinary cycle show up in places as diverse as Freud's meta-psychological conception of Eros. In each person, then, the interaction of *Angst* and *Erregung*, embodying the tension between the two principles, will play itself out according to the self that has emerged. Although there is a historical teleology explicit in these pages—not to mention an oblique reference to the Apocalypse of John (SW VII, 379–80)—it is not clear that telos will be realised in ‘the present age’; nothing indicates that the principle of light will triumph and not sink back into chaos.¹² In time however, the “point of origin” or *Basis* will be resorbed into light, or drift into insignificance.¹³ But the problem is that this “*in time*” fails to capture the necessity with which the principle of love triumphs; that is, how God, conceived as the one, though ever in the uniduality that began Schelling’s exposition of his two principles, how this God unifies or sublimates that dark principle in light. Until then—if there is indeed a “then”—the wisdom Schelling urges us to pursue is a *gnōthi seautόn*, which, holding reason ever close to “the heart,” does not contravene the “most sacred sentiments and feelings and moral consciousness (*Gemüt und sittlichen Bewußtsein*)” (SW VII, 413). As he urges two years later in the *Weltalter* (1811), a certain theosophy *must* dwell with philosophy, keeping its sights on the positivity of revelation that begins, firstly, in nature itself.

Kreatur aus Nichts erschaffen, woher ihre Korruptibilität und Mangelhaftigkeit komme (*De libero arbitrio*, lib. I, cap. 2). Jenes Nichts ist nun schon lange das Kreuz des Verstandes. Einen Aufschluß gibt der Ausdruck der Schrift: der Mensch sei *ek tōn mē ontōn*, aus dem, das da nicht ist, geschaffen, so wie das berühmte *mē on* der Alten, welches, so wie die Schöpfung aus Nichts, durch die obige Unterscheidung zuerst eine positive Bedeutung bekommen möchte.” (Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*², Berlin, Akademie, 2016, p. 38).

12. After comparing Schelling and Schlegel, Hans Blumenberg puts his finger on the dilemma that gives rise to the temptation to dualism or Gnosticism, with an eye to Schelling’s youthful work: “When the Greek discovered the cosmos *and* tragedy, the relation of the gods to the admired world-order remained unclarified and doubtful for them. It was to emerge that Christianity, too, could not overcome this ambivalence – indeed, that it intensified if even further because it had to claim the identical God for the creation *and* for its redemption. How the perfection of the first act could allow the second act’s desperate intervention to become necessary was *so far from being satisfactorily explicable* that the Gnostic separation of the responsibilities for the world and for salvation had to remain the *most tempting solution to this radical dilemma*.” See *The Genesis of the Copernican World*², trans. Robert M. WALLACE, Cambridge MA, The MIT Press, 1987 (first published in 1975), p. 71.

13. See, for the truths of revelation moving into the truths of reason (Lessing), p. 412.

4. Schelling's "Positive Philosophy," uniting natural theology and revealed religion

It is not my aim to comment or criticize this extraordinary text, which crowned the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling and whose intuitions accompany him, throughout his unpublished thought, into the *Philosophy of Revelation*. It remains extraordinary because, through the self-birth of the universe, it lays bare a natural teleology built upon a natural theology of creation or what we can call "Being." Through the higher-degree birth of humans out of nature and spirit, Schelling further opened rational theology to an ethics of the good will,¹⁴ reflecting the divine will of love. He thus took up the task of bridging "natural theology and *revealed religion*,"¹⁵ proposing his original solution to the Kantian dilemma. I believe Heidegger argues fairly that Schelling did not so much change systems as struggle "passionately ever since his earliest periods for his one and unique standpoint," which is largely this solution.¹⁶ If the *Philosophy of Revelation* stands as anything like the culmination of his struggle, then we might note that, by 1840, the system unfolds according to a three-term logic of the *can-be* (*Seinkönnende*), the mere-being (*Seiende*), and a third term that he chose to leave unnamed: "The third cannot be defined otherwise than as *that which is effectively free to be and not to be*." (PR, in SW XIII, 235) This excluded-included middle, in which the freedom to be or not to be coexisted, ultimately denoted the source of all acting and willing, beyond understanding and theorization. Not so unlike the light principle that consummates the path taken in the *Inquiries*, the *Philosophy of Revelation*'s unpronounceable third term completed "that, which will be" and so, "with this determination we have [...] reached," said Schelling, "the absolute" (PR, in SW XIII, 238).

Perhaps this "theodicy" is less "impossible" than unspeakable. What after all do we gain by opposing binaries like possible-impossible to a philosophy of becoming the dogged possibility of synoptic intuition? Schelling's recurrence to Ploucquet's logic of conciliation allowed him to valorize an indeterminacy that Manfred Frank clarifies this way: supposing De Morgan's Law, dating from after Schelling's work, that the negation of a disjunction $\sim(A \vee B)$ is equivalent to the conjunction of the two terms negated ($\sim A \& \sim B$), it remains that in the

14. Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. PLUHAR, Indianapolis IN, Hackett Publishing, 1987, pp. 326-334. In German, see *Akademie-Ausgabe von Immanuel Kants Gesammelten Werken*, Vol. V, Berlin, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, pp. 438-447. Hereafter AK.

15. Friedrich SCHELLING, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, in *Friedrich Wilhelm von Schellings Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 13, Stuttgart, Cotta'scher Verlag, 1855-1861, p. 46. Hereafter abbreviated PR with the SW page number in the text.

16. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan STAMBAUGH, Athens OH, Ohio University Press, 1985, p. 6. Hereafter abbreviated STE.

disjunctive formulation, *one* of the terms opposed is positive. By contrast, the conjunction shows only two negated terms. Yet they are formally equivalent. What has happened? The ‘positivity’ in the disjunction has passed without apparent residue into the conjunction of negated terms. But this is the case only in one of the aspects of the conceptual deployment. In the other aspect, the positivity remains, yet as if imperceptible in the formalization. You can image how useful such a logic was for thinking the two natures of God in the Christian trinity (Jesus as man and Jesus as God). For Schelling, however, this logic pointed beyond idealist formalism toward a positive philosophy of paradoxical conciliation.

5. Levinas secularizes Schelling

The connection to Levinas passes through Franz Rosenzweig’s struggle against Hegelianism in *The Star of Redemption* (1921). But Levinas sets it into a kind of phenomenology, or a pre-phenomenology, steeped as he is in the rationalist Judaism that contested Kabbalah. Thus, during his captivity in Fallingbostel, Levinas reflected on the basis of existence out of which arises intelligibility or, for him, active intentionality. Already in 1944, he wrote: “Hypostase – comme terme par lequel je pourrais remplacer la notion de subjectivité.” (Carnet V, 1944)¹⁷ And he immediately added a Talmudic gloss on Genesis 25:22: “But the children [Jacob and Esau] struggled in her [Rebecca’s] womb.’ This evokes both the co-originarity of good and evil, and the roots of Judaism and Christianity (Genesis 32:29).” Now this might seem a peculiar reading of Judaism or Christianity, and we might wonder what connects Jacob and Esau with the *hypostasis* by which Levinas replaces subjectivity. Is he thinking of Kabbalah? He is certainly not thinking of mere dualism, any more than Schelling was. He adds: “Les principes du bien et du mal qui ont dans le judaïsme et le christianisme la même source – tragique de cette communauté d’origine. Dans la religion d’Ormund et d’Orient [i.e. Zoroastrianism, Manicheism] il n’en est rien.” (CC, 146)

Whatever we make of his interpretation of dualism, the common source of good and evil in Judaism and Christianity bespeaks the tragedy of the human and the ever present possibility of evil. Obviously, felling trees in an officer’s camp while his family was murdered motivated Levinas to take evil seriously, as a kind of existential. And, to be sure, Levinas was interested in a subject, something emerging from itself as consciousness. He was looking to undercut Heidegger’s *Dasein* as the site of listening and questioning. What he seeks is a “sub-ject” that is thrown, *jacere*, embodied, but not yet master of its

17. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Oeuvres I: Carnets de captivité*, eds. Rodolphe CALIN and Catherine CHALIER, Paris, Grasset-IMEC, 2009, p. 146. Hereafter abbreviated as CC.

intentions and acts – in a word, a *Basis*. Levinas writes in the same notebook, “*Anokhi* [in Hebrew, the word for the «I» of mastery]. It does not encompass the unity of its personality [*ne comprend pas l'unité de sa personne*], and yet it is conditioned by this contradiction.” (CC, 146–147; my trans.) Thinking within Judaism and Husserlian phenomenology, Levinas imagines ‘situations’ that afford us access to a pre-reflective, profoundly embodied experience in which Being and self are indeterminately mingled. Between 1944 and 1947 when he publishes *De l'existence à l'existant*, this is the *il y a*, the moiling contrapositive of Heidegger's *es gibt*, which echoes the *tohu-va vohu* preceding creation in Genesis. Out of this *il y a* prior to subjects and objects arises the “hypostasis” – a term we find when Jewish mysticism sets to speaking “Greek” (from Philo to Abulafia). Important in Levinas's *mises en scène* of sleeplessness and awakening, is that the hypostasis arises from its localization, from its body, like the first intelligible from the ground zero of Being. Where Schelling spoke of a kind of tension between the two first principles, Levinas proposes a phenomenology of awakening. Rather than dialectizing, the hypostasis emerges, as if ecstatically, from Being, over which it can assume a certain mastery, for itself. Levinas writes:

Par la position dans l'*il y a* anonyme s'affirme un sujet. Affirmation au sens étymologique du terme, position sur un terrain ferme, sur une base, conditionnement, fondement. Le sujet qui s'arrache à la vigilance anonyme de l'*il y a* n'a pas été cherché comme *pensée* ou comme *conscience*, ou comme esprit.¹⁸

The watchword is “basis,” which Levinas adapts and modifies such that it no longer serves theodicy or theosophy, but a phenomenology of the body that is neither Husserl's *Körper* nor his intentionally-experienced *Leib*.

Like Schelling seeking the root common to nature and history, Levinas will argue that: “Notre recherche ne partait pas de l'antique opposition du moi et du monde. Il s'agissait de déterminer la signification d'un fait beaucoup plus général: de l'apparition même d'un existant, d'un substantif au sein de cette existence impersonnelle que, à parler rigoureusement, l'on ne peut nommer, car elle est pur verbe.” (DEAE, 139–140; EE, 82)

From the becoming or verbality of Being borrowed from Schelling – as from Franz Rosenzweig who appropriated Schelling's logic in 1921 – from pure verbality arises a substantive, a word or noun. In what Kabbalah conceived as a contraction of being or god, a word congeals that is *creative* rather than the epiphenomenon of Being. If Schelling sought to revitalize Spinoza and clarify what was deemed his “pantheism,” and if this required “*die ganze Macht einer*

18. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *De l'existence à l'existant*, Paris, J. Vrin, 1993; first edition published by Fontaine, 1947, pp. 139–140; In English, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 2001, p. 82. Hereafter abbreviated DEAE and EE in the text.

[...] gründlich ausgebildeten Philosophie” as we have seen, then Levinas is struggling against his targets of Hegelian dialectics and Heidegger’s ‘revelation’ of Being. Like Schelling, he requires the power of a philosophy fundamentally worked out, this time biblical *and* talmudic, and in which “the word *davar* [meaning “word” *and* “thing”] teaches us [...] that any dissociation between the universe of language and that of Being is foreign to the Hebrew language.”¹⁹ In short, creation emerges from and as the *Said [du Dit]* of God, “because the Word [*le Verbe*], in its purity, is creative” – an intuition hardly lost on Schelling, with its permutations specific to Jewish and Christian mysticism.²⁰

Recall that Schelling had urged that the relationship between the *Basis* and *das Wort* or meaning-incipient can be understood as “a birth out of darkness into light:” As Schelling rhapsodized “the seed must be buried in the earth and die in darkness in order that the lovelier creature of light should rise and unfold itself in the rays of the sun. Man is formed in his mother’s womb; and only out of the darkness of unreason (out of feeling, out of longing...) grow clear thoughts.” (PINHF, 35; SW VII, 360) In his turn, Levinas rethinks being and time, in light of Heidegger. At the source of ecstatic temporality, he sets the instant of emergence: “Ce mouvement de venir à soi sans partir de quelque part ne se confond pas avec celui qui franchit un intervalle du temps. Il se fait dans l’instant lui-même où quelque chose [...] précède l’instant.” (DEAE, 131; EE, 75-76) What precedes time and temporization is “le drame inhérent à l’instant lui-même,” as Malebranche put it, “sa lutte pour l’existence que le mécanisme méconnaît en considérant l’instant comme élément simple et inerte du temps” (DEAE, 129; EE, 73-74). Out of its own bodily basis, and prior to any distinction between being and beings, emerges, “dramatically,” the hypostasis as incipient crystallization of subjectivity. *This sub-ject*²¹ is a birth neither out of the world nor out of Being, and therefore ventures to contest Heidegger’s ontological difference. It is like Schelling’s birth out of self, and nightly, cyclically, it “dies back into itself” by falling asleep. Levinas transposes

19. André NEHER, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, Philadelphia PA, Jewish Publication Society, 1970 translation, p. 99 in the original.

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

21. Which Jean-François Courtine translated literally as the *jacent-au-fond* or lying at the base. See “Schelling et l’achèvement de la métaphysique” in *Extase de la raison: essais sur Schelling*, Paris, Galilée, 1990, pp. 169-199, esp. 185: “le jacent-au-fond, c’est ce sans quoi un autre ne peut pas être, mais qui lui-même peut être sans l’autre. Du même coup, sa *priorité* [...] est seulement ‘ce sans quoi,’ mais non pas ‘ce grâce à quoi’ une chose est précisément la chose qu’elle est.”

Schelling's absolute to the human. Schelling would hardly have contested such a transposition.

For Levinas, the paradox of a birth out of self is that this coming into being “is” only in its now, its instant, but if we shift perspectives slightly, we discover that “dans l'instant lui-même,” there is “quelque chose si l'on peut dire [qui] précède l'instant” (DEAE, 131; EE, 75). Via this Schellingian and chiasmatic logic, the present is absolute birth and anything that lies “before” the instant of the emergence of hypostasis from its base, is simply beyond representation (DEAE, 131; EE, 75).²²

We might recall Schelling's words, here again: “Without this preceding gloom, creation would have no reality; darkness is its necessary heritage. Only God – *the Existent himself* – dwells in pure light; for he alone is self-born.” (SW VII, 360; PINHF, 34, emphasis added)

Beyond these indicative remarks, Schelling's influence on Levinas could well be shown systematically. For our purposes, the question of evil in Levinas becomes the question of freedom and the tension between intelligibility and ground, or the hypostasis and the *il y a*. Does Levinas's *il y a* lead in some way to evil or is it above all a way to think birth processually and instantaneously? Recall Levinas's *Carnets de captivité* notes on Genesis 15:22. Good and evil are co-originary in the womb. Jacob and Esau struggled already before they came into the world. The *il y a* is not evil in itself, any more than the *Basis* is evil. But Levinas's *il y a* is not ecstatic, either. It is a “ground” out of which arises an embodied being, the “hypostasis,” through whose emergence a subject that is both *moi* and *soi*, intentional and corporeal, eventuates prior to Heidegger's Being that calls silently in *Da-sein*. The least I can say is that embodiment, understood as drives life, allows Levinas to ponder evil as chaos

22. Compare the use, here, of “accomplir l'événement du commencement” with an entry from “Carnet VII,” which dates from 1944 or 1945: “Chez Heidegger [l']existence accomplit la compréhension. (Il prend l'idée husserlienne de l'intention spécifique, adéquate à l'être des objets, pour voir dans les faits de l'existence, dans toute leur concrétion des compréhensions.) Pour moi, l'existence accomplit mais non pas en tant que compréhension. Elle accomplit spécifiquement – ce n'est pas un événement extérieur – mais la compréhension est en dehors de l'accomplie [sic]. La compréhension toujours théorique, toujours lumière. Elle donne à l'accomplissement sa signification propre – qui est dans la tension dramatique (temps – *felix culpa*). (Par elle [la tension dramatique] ce n'est pas un événement extérieur, c'est le symbole anticipant. Mais le symbolisme, [connaissance?] philosophie – n'est pas l'événement même.” In Levinas, *Carnets de Captivité, et autres inédits*, Vol. I, Paris, Grasset et Fasquelle, 2009, p. 184. By restricting his investigations to a pre-ontological *comprehension* by *Dasein* of its Being, Heidegger remains at a conceptual-intuitive level that Levinas here calls “symbolic”; the symbolic is not language so much as it is already representation. In that way, it is not an event *per se*; it has already happened. Thus: “le corps est en fait la *façon* dont un être, ni spatial, ni étranger à l'étendue [...] physique, existe séparément [...]. Non pas qu'à une intention dite théorique, base du moi, s'ajouteraient des volontés, des désirs et des sentiments, pour transformer la pensée en vie. La thèse strictement intellectualiste subordonne la vie à la représentation.” (emphasis added) Also see Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1961.

and suffering. That is, he approaches evil from the perspective of the one who *suffers it*.

6. By way of conclusion

There is no theodicy in Levinas. And his phenomenology does not always allow us to account for evil. On the other hand, Levinas shows us a way in which suffering points beyond the evil of man's egotism in Schelling (the will of the self, *Eigenwillens*). Suffering comes to denote the "alterity" of a memory that does not synthesize into our intentional time consciousness. This conception of evil serves his strategy of linking suffering with intersubjective passion, or 'our' pre-conscious inability to get through the melancholia – or trauma – of having failed to assist one who suffered and to whom 'we' did not respond. Is this perspective adequate justification of evil? Can Schelling's theodicy be replaced by Levinas' "patho-dicy"? Perhaps, but above all, it does undercut Schelling's drive-self that moves out of the center and toward passional hegemony. It undercuts this by inquiring how it is that 'we' become aware at all of the co-presence of good and evil, that same co-presence that Levinas found in Talmud, and Schelling in Böhme's Christian Kabbalah. Like the phenomenological descriptions he proposed of the hypostasis, the priority of evil as drives-based and willed gets shifted toward its condition of possibility in intersubjectivity. That is, in the emergence of self from itself out of its bodily location, which for Levinas is followed by the higher level emergence of the ego through social encounters. The Schellingian logic seems still present. But I find this a productive approach to evil, as it neither abstracts it nor rationalizes it. Not unlike Schelling, it re-thinks the question, shifts perspective, asking: in what sense, for us, today, is evil important?

*Faculté des arts et sciences – Département de philosophie
Université de Montréal*

SUMMARY

This article examines Schelling's 1809 account of the origin of freedom and the possibility of human evil in the birth of "God" or "Being" out of two conjoined principles existing with neither common genus nor determinable interaction. The model for his "pistol shot" origin of the universe (or "God") is organicist. It provides one of the first explanations of evil in light of the balance – or its lack – between a drives principle and a rational one in human beings. Surprisingly, and in a way that heralded the end of late Idealism, Schelling's logic drew heavily on the Kabbalistic thought of Jacob Böhme and the mysticism of Franz Baader. Perhaps it was this that incited Levinas to experiment with Schelling's logic as he argued against the primacy of Heidegger's Being in a philosophy

concerned with the ethical relations between humans. The logic is, in any event, patent in Levinas' 1940 essays, and allows him to show, phenomenologically, how a being emerges, like Schelling's principle of intelligibility, from unconsciousness (sleep) to dominate the "being" around it.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article présente l'explication, par Friedrich Schelling, de l'origine de la liberté et la possibilité du mal humain en faisant retour à la naissance de "Dieu" (ou de l'être). Celle-ci se situerait dans l'émergence de l'intelligible (la lumière) de la *Basis* divine ; autrement dit, la naissance d'un Dieu *de lui-même*. La divinité schellingienne consisterait en deux principes sans interaction ni genre commun. Le modèle qui servait à Schelling pour sa représentation de l'origine de l'univers en « coup de pistolet » est enraciné dans un certain organicisme, lui-même développé dans la philosophie de la nature. Le mal est ainsi éclairé à la lumière du déséquilibre, dans l'être humain, entre ses pulsions (liées à la *Basis* divine) et sa raison (liée à l'intelligibilité divine). Il est surprenant que celui qui fut responsable de l'ultime transformation du *Spätidealismus* s'inspire pour sa théodicée de la pensée cabbalistique de Jacob Böhme et du mysticisme de Franz Baader. Et c'est d'ailleurs cela qui aurait inspiré Emmanuel Levinas de suivre cette logique dans ses premiers essais philosophiques où il contestait la primauté de la question de l'Être chez Heidegger. Afin d'installer au centre de sa philosophie l'interrelation éthique entre êtres humains, Levinas proposait une phénoménologie du sujet émergeant de l'inconscience (du sommeil) – à la manière de l'intelligibilité schellingienne – pour dominer l'être et les existants autour de lui.

ABSOLUTE EVIL: REFLECTIONS ON HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

JOHN W. BURBIDGE

One of the strongest objections to Hegel's philosophy is that he does not have a robust ethical theory. By situating moral action within the institutions of family, civil society, and state he appears to exclude any appeal to moral standards that can stand in judgement on the practices of society. W.H. Walsh expressed this dismay forcefully: "[Hegel's] ethical theory, if carried to its logical conclusion, involves the dissolution of ethics into sociology."¹ Indeed, Hegel himself admits that philosophy has no role in "giving instructions as to what the world ought to be. [It] ... always comes on the scene too late to give it."²

This suggests that Hegel has no theory of radical evil. As he works his way through the *Phenomenology*, he regularly shows that the knowledge claims that appeal to moral values turn out to be impotent when faced with the realism of those able to play with duplicity. And it is those ambiguities that generate the need for more comprehensive conceptual frameworks. Progress and development derives not from what is supposed to be good, but from the evil and bad.

In this paper I want to argue that that is too simplistic a perception – that we can find in Hegel's philosophy elements of a theory of absolute evil; and that this has its implications for what could be defined as a moral point of view. I propose to do this by exploring to what, if anything, Hegel can ascribe absolute value, and then identify evil as its opposite or contradictory. Just as Kant defines radical evil as the contradictory of adopting the categorical imperative, so that anyone who is not consistently moral is by definition radically immoral because the categorical imperative has turned out not to be her or his maxim, a Hegelian definition of evil will be that which consistently works against the implementation of ultimate value.

1. William Henry WALSH, *Hegelian Ethics*, London, Macmillan; New York NY, St. Martin's, 1969, p. 55.

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Philosophy of Right*, tr. Thomas M. KNOX, Oxford, Clarendon, 1942, p. 12.

I

Of the three traditional transcendentals, beauty, truth and goodness, Hegel only explicitly talks about the quest for truth. In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* he suggests that its pilgrimage is defined by the tension between certainty and truth: when a certainty discovers that what it thought was true turns out to be fatally flawed, it is plunged into despair, a despair that then generates a new certainty that incorporates what it has learned from that experience. Absolute knowing can only be achieved when certainty has reached a truth that is impervious to the disappointment of experience.

This goal would seem to be unachievable; for any claim that what one knows is absolutely true embodies the remarkable *hybris* that one knows everything, including the future, so that there will be nothing that could possibly turn up to compromise or shatter that confidence. Yet that claim of certainty flies in the face of the whole panorama of human experience. And it seems highly improbable that Hegel would make such a manifestly fallible claim. So we need to turn to the dense and difficult final chapter of the *Phenomenology* to see how Hegel in fact develops a credible theory of absolute knowing.

In that chapter, Hegel draws a distinction between what has been accomplished so far in his argument concerning knowledge on its own account (*für sich*) (which corresponds with the claim to certainty of the Introduction) and what has been achieved with respect to knowledge in itself (*an sich*) (which corresponds to the standard of truth). The former narrative ended with the episode of the beautiful soul. Integrating into her decision all that she has learned from accumulated experience, the beautiful soul acts to accomplish what is good. That action, however, turns out to be flawed and to produce results which she should have known would be evil. So she stands under the harsh condemnation of a strict judge, who bases his judgement on the common experience that he shares with the beautiful soul. The beautiful soul recognizes the justice of the condemnation; and in due course the judge comes to realize that the condemnation itself is flawed and needs to be modified. The result is forgiveness and reconciliation.

In the transition to the final chapter, the pilgrim following the path of the *Phenomenology* realizes that the pattern exemplified in the dynamic story of the beautiful soul is the pattern that has characterized every step in her pilgrimage. A certain claim is put into practice, only to learn from experience that the results are not at all what was expected, forcing a reconsideration of what one thought one knew and building what has been learnt from experience into the next confident claim. The recognition of that dynamic as the structure of the process of knowing is what satisfies the requirement of absolute knowing. Because the process is self-correcting, the certainty which affirms it can be confident that what it affirms is true.

The pilgrim has achieved a kind of self-knowledge which enables her to live appropriately in the world. But does that self-knowledge characterize the world in which she lives – the cosmos that makes up things as they are in themselves? That is the question of the *an sich* – of truth. Hegel suggests that it has been answered in revealed religion, for it has told the story of the ultimate ground of the universe acting to create an independent world; learning from experience that that world is not all that it had expected; acting in a new way to achieve a more comprehensive result only to have that initiative terminate in death; discovering that that death opens up the dynamic of a new kind of life – a pattern that is not only exemplified in the transition from the incarnate one's earthly life into the presence of the spirit, but also in the lives of believers who pass through the dark night of the soul, where the abstract God who provided eternal security himself lies dead, into the dynamic life of action and forgiveness.

So Hegel can provide an indication of what is meant by the True. It is the dynamic in which, based on the wisdom accumulated over time, one acts, discovers that there are unexpected and unpleasant surprises which one never expected, and, by becoming reconciled with them, reaches a more comprehensive understanding of the way things are. By recognizing that it is isomorphic with the appeal to conscience of the beautiful soul and the condemnation of the critical judge, he implies that the quest for the True is equally the quest for the Good. If, then, we want to identify what evil would mean in his system, we could do worse than taking this normative statement and looking for its contrary or opposite.

Hegel helps us out in this quest. For in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as we have already noted, he sketches the very process of learning from experience that he ultimately enshrines as the pattern of absolute knowing. And in that text he identifies three ways in which the fear of this truth finds expression: it can withdraw from the quest “and struggle to preserve for itself that which is in danger of being lost”; “it can take its stand as a form of sentimentality which assures us it finds everything *good of its kind*”; or “it may conceal itself from itself and others behind the pretext that precisely burning zeal for the truth makes it so difficult, nay impossible, to find any other truth except that of which vanity alone is capable [...]. This [latter] sort of conceit [...] understands how to belittle every truth and turn away back into itself and gloats over this its own private understanding, which always knows how to dissipate every possible thought, and to find, instead of all the content merely the barren Ego.”³

3. G.W. Friedrich HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 80, all citations from James Black Baillie's translation, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1955, p. 138.

There are, then, three forms of evil. Let me start from the third: the clever undergraduate who knows how to refute every position that is put forward and steadfastly refuses to allow any attempt to replace it with something viable. Hegel's response is to leave it to itself, for it disdains doing anything that will have an impact within the wider world, and focuses simply on its own self-satisfaction. The implication is that, willy-nilly, it will have to make some decisions about what to do and will have to affirm some certain convictions about what is true of the world in which it lives.

The second form is the position of sentimental romanticism and relativism. It assumes that there will be different truths and different goods for different people and for different cultures, and it is illegitimate to try to discriminate among them or to judge some as better than others. This, Hegel says, is really saying that there is no such thing as the True or the Good. Yet in making that claim, it is implicitly affirming that that relativistic position is true, and that the only good actions are those that refuse to discriminate. And in that affirmation it is performing the very action that it is at the same time condemning.

In both of these forms of evil, there is, willy-nilly, ultimately a retreat to the first form, the "struggle to preserve that which is in danger of being lost." Rather than admitting that the true is embodied in the quest for the truth that is always ready to learn from experience and to take account of what actually happens in the world, it affirms as true a certainty that it has acquired in the past, whether explicitly in a claim to infallibility, or implicitly, as a result of its sentimentality or clever conceits. It makes an assertion that it holds to be absolutely true.

At this point another comment in Hegel's *Introduction* comes into play:

[S]cience cannot simply reject a form of knowledge which is not true, and treat this as a common view of things, and then assure us that [it] itself is an entirely different kind of knowledge, and holds the other to be of no account at all; nor can it appeal to the fact that in this other there are presages of a better. By giving that *assurance* it would declare its force and value to lie in its bare *existence*; but the untrue knowledge appeals likewise to the fact that it *exists*, and *assures* us that to it science is nothing. *One* barren assurance, however, is of just as much value as another.⁴

It matters not whether that confident assurance appeals to an external authority or is based on one's own sincere conviction: "To follow one's own conviction is certainly more than to hand oneself over to authority; but by the conversion of opinion held on authority into opinion held out of personal conviction, the content of what is held is not necessarily altered, and truth has not thereby taken the place of error."⁵

4. *Phenomenology*, § 76, Baillie, pp. 134-135.

5. *Phenomenology*, § 78, Baillie, p 136.

On the basis of these comments, then, I am proposing that absolute evil, for Hegel, is the refusal to be open to the education of experience because one affirms with confident assurance some claim that is to stand against all evidence that might prove it false. It makes a categorical claim to infallibility – that it is asserting what is absolutely true, or willing what is absolutely good; and insists that any attempt to question that claim in light of experience is to be absolutely rejected.

II

It is useful to recall a passage from Kant, in which he discusses the significance of the adjective “absolute.” He distinguishes two senses of the term. In the first, “the word ‘absolute’ is now often used merely to indicate that something is true of a thing considered *in itself*, and therefore of its *inward* nature. In this sense the *absolutely possible* would mean that which in itself is possible – which is, in fact, the *least* that can be said of an object. On the other hand, the word is also sometimes used to indicate that something is valid in all respects, without limitation, e.g. absolute despotism, and in this sense the *absolutely possible* would mean what is *in every relation* (in all respects) *possible* – which is the *most* that can be said of the possibility of a thing.”⁶ Hegel in fact uses the term in both senses. When he talks about absolute knowing or absolute spirit he is using it in the second sense; but in his discussion of absolute difference, for example, he is talking about difference simply taken on its own, apart from any relationship.

This throws an important light on what I have called “absolute evil.” For it is the conviction that its claim is true or good in itself – in its inward nature – irrespective of any other consideration. It appeals to principle, indeed to the absolute reliability of what it affirms and totally discounts anything that might call this in question. As such, it is certainly absolute in the first sense.

Yet, although this position claims to be absolute in the second sense, it ultimately falls victim to experience. For it cannot escape the influence of time and circumstance. When such claims to infallible truth are put into practice, they inevitably produce results that run counter to their confident expectations. And this for several reasons. First, agents not only stand within particular locations in space and time which limit the range of what they know about what goes on in the world as a whole, but they also have to concentrate their attention, which means that they cannot be aware of “every relation possible” in making their decision. Infallible claims to truth and goodness become

6. Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A324-5, B381, tr. Kemp SMITH, London, Macmillan, 1953, p. 317.

false and evil because unforeseen circumstances and conditions do not fit into the framework provided by the confident claims.

But, second, genuine novelties can emerge. Circumstances and conditions can combine in ways and in patterns that are quite unprecedented, some contingent and transient, others that become continuing characteristics of the social and natural world. What was true, in the sense that it provided a satisfactory explanation at one time, can become false because society has been transformed, or because natural processes have been submitted to unprecedented stresses. Like the beautiful soul, those who absolutize claims to truth or goodness, generate results that confound and distort their confident expectations. Not all of them will admit that those results follow from their initiative. They see failure as the product of alien evil forces, the machinations of others. In fact, it is just such attempts to escape responsibility for their own actions that reveal them to be absolutely evil. At the same time, agents cannot escape the consequences of the forces that they have unleashed. The world in its rich complexity works out its destiny. Confident claims to infallible and absolute truth and goodness are shown to be fallible and relative by the ongoing pattern of developing time.

This is why Hegel says that philosophy always comes on the scene too late to tell us what we ought to do.

We have already seen that two common responses to the evil produced by confident assertions of absolute truth and goodness are themselves compromised. The sentimental avoidance of making any absolute claim, by allowing that anything can be good of its type, when faced with a radical challenge is inclined to make its assertion of radical relativism into an absolute in its turn. In a similar way the person who simply abandons all claims to truth or goodness, seeing them as mere opinions, direct responses to emotive forces, when challenged is inclined to make that assertion itself into an absolute.

The only effective way of fixing our belief in ways that recognize human fallibility is to recognize that there is a real world, independent of our thoughts and beliefs, that has the capacity to show through experience that our confident expectations are false. That opens the door to correcting our beliefs so that they more adequately capture the world as it really is, both in terms of what approaches the true, and what implements and achieves results that are good.

There are two key elements of this approach. In the first place it requires humility, a fundamental acknowledgement that there is a world out there which is quite independent of our thoughts, and we can only come to know what that world is like if we are ready to recognize ways in which it fails to meet our expectations. Rather than forcing the world into our preconceptions, we notice how it is constantly surprising us. In a way, the strategy of absolute knowing shares this refusal to claim a confident access to truth with the sen-

timental relativist and the practical immersion in the flowing current of everyday life, but is able to maintain it consistently.

But a second element is equally important. For we need to have a sense of the links and connections that lead from our actions to those unexpected results. The world is not made up of a number of independent events and entities that develop in splendid isolation and are unaffected by what happens around them. Our task is not only to accept humbly the unexpected surprises, but to discover and explore the ways in which our actions, together with the surrounding environment, provide the conditions that generate those results. Learning requires that creative ability to recognize the interconnections that make up the world. From the anomalies that confound our expectations, we develop a more comprehensive understanding of the causal links by which it maintains its regularity and stability. It is this which opens up the path to truth and goodness, not only because it is a way of doing justice to the world in which we live, but also because it provides justified expectations that are reliable enough and clear enough to expose the way some of the phenomena that emerge from our action do in fact challenge and run counter to the wisdom we have accumulated. We can only be genuinely surprised when we have a clear and reliable base for our judgements.

It is the openness to recognizing the way the world in fact differs from our fond beliefs, and the readiness to then modify those beliefs to take those differences into account that effectively counter the threat of absolute evil by showing us how the emergence of results that run counter to our expectations are not the work of perverse and evil forces, but are the means of approaching ever more effectively the true and the good.

Peterborough, ON

SUMMARY

Hegel is charged with not drawing a sharp distinction between right and wrong, and so with being unable to take seriously the radical nature of evil. By looking at what is involved in absolute knowing in which one recognizes the universal significance of learning from experience, one can draw the implication that evil would be whatever is opposite or contradictory to that stance. In other words, evil involves taking some truth as absolutely and infallibly certain. Kant points out that "absolute" has two senses: one either takes something on its own, abstracted from all relations, or one takes it as encompassing the totality of relations. Absolute evil isolates, according to the first sense. But because it is partial and subject to the vagaries of space and time, evil is inevitably taken up into a larger, more complicated totality.

SOMMAIRE

On dit que Hegel ne fait pas de distinction marquée entre ce qui est bon et ce qui est mauvais et que, par conséquent, il ne peut prendre au sérieux la nature radicale du mal. Quand on considère le savoir absolu, au sein duquel on reconnaît l'importance universelle de l'apprentissage par expérience, on peut conclure que le mal serait ce qui contredit ou s'oppose à cet usage. Autrement dit, le mal radical comporte la conception d'une vérité comme absolue et infailliblement certaine. Kant fait valoir que l'adjectif «absolu» a deux sens: ou bien on conçoit une chose en elle-même, isolée de toute relation; ou bien on la conçoit comme si elle comprenait la totalité des relations. Le mal absolu comporte l'isolement selon la première signification. Mais, parce qu'il est partiel et sujet aux caprices du temps et de l'espace, le mal est inévitablement incorporé dans une totalité plus grande et plus complexe.

HEGEL, KANT ET LE PROBLÈME DU MAL

MARTIN THIBODEAU

En comparaison de Kant qui lui a consacré un essai ou de Fichte et de Schelling qui ont entrepris, chacun à leur façon, de prolonger et, à certains égards, de rectifier les réflexions kantiennes sur le sujet, Hegel ne semble pas avoir porté une attention aussi soutenue au problème du mal. En effet, dans l'ensemble de sa philosophie systématique de la maturité, le propos qu'il consacre explicitement à ce problème est somme toute assez restreint et est dispersé dans plusieurs ouvrages, notamment dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, dans les *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion* et dans les *Cours sur la philosophie de l'histoire*. De plus, si l'on se fie à un certain nombre d'interprètes, il semblerait que la philosophie de Hegel soit loin de faire entièrement droit au problème du mal. À en croire Jacques Rivelaygue, par exemple, il serait impossible, dans le cadre du système de l'idéalisme absolu, de prendre le mal au sérieux, « [puisque] la réalité positive du mal [est] fondée sur une dialectique de la raison qui nécessairement le pense toujours comme déjà évacué»¹. Abondant en ce sens, Luc Ferry soutient que la dialectique de Hegel est conduite « à remettre en cause la différence entre le bien et le mal et est ainsi menée à légitimer tout ce qui est»². De son côté, Frederick Beiser, en s'intéressant à la reprise hégélienne du motif leibnizien de la théodicée affirme que « dans le compte rendu fondamentalement optimiste de Hegel, rien n'est perdu ni accompli en vain dans le royaume de l'histoire»³. Enfin, Paul Ricoeur pose la question de savoir « si cette dialectique ne reconstitue pas, avec des ressources logiques dont ne disposait pas Leibniz, un optimisme issu de la même audace, mais d'une *hybris* rationnelle peut-être plus grande encore»⁴. Selon une telle interprétation, la connaissance spéculative abandonnerait le point de vue fini de l'entendement humain pour adopter celui de Dieu. Ce faisant, elle en viendrait à considérer « l'injustifié » comme étant

1. Jacques RIVELAYGUE, « Schelling et les apories du droit », *Cahiers de philosophie politique*, no. 1, Ousia, 1983, p. 49.

2. Luc FERRY, *Philosophie politique*, 2, Paris, P.U.F., 1984, p. 57-64.

3. Frederick BEISER, *Hegel*, New York NY, Routledge, 2005, p. 272.

4. Paul RICOEUR, *Le mal. Un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1996, p. 32.

plutôt inscrit dans un projet divin, se rendant ainsi indifférente à l'infortune et à la souffrance des hommes pour, au contraire, se réjouir de qui lui paraît plutôt être la réalisation du Bien ou de la Raison dans l'histoire.

En somme, d'après ces interprétations, la philosophie hégélienne se révélerait sourde au problème du mal et incapable d'en penser les termes, car sa conceptualité, dans son caractère processuel, dialectique et spéculatif, en nierait la réalité. Or, une lecture attentive du système hégélien montre plutôt que le problème du mal est plutôt omniprésent et qu'il fait l'objet d'une thématisation en bonne et due forme à des moments décisifs du système de l'*Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques*. De plus, une telle lecture montre que, loin d'en nier la «réalité», la philosophie de Hegel, à l'instar de celle de Kant, conçoit le mal comme étant étroitement lié à la liberté humaine et que, par conséquent, c'est à l'être humain et à lui seul qu'il doit être imputé.

Dans ce qui suit, nous nous proposons d'examiner deux de ces moments décisifs. Le premier moment est celui qui, sur le plan systématique, se situe dans la sphère de l'esprit objectif, c'est-à-dire cette sphère en laquelle Hegel examine comment ce qu'il appelle l'esprit entreprend, dans le cadre de sa vie éthique et politique, de réaliser sa liberté. Notre propos se concentrera sur le chapitre des *Principes de la philosophie du droit* portant sur la moralité. C'est dans ce chapitre qu'il aborde explicitement le problème du bien et du mal. Bien sûr, son analyse est l'occasion d'une confrontation avec la philosophie morale de Kant, car, à ses yeux, ce dernier est le philosophe qui a défini de la façon la plus adéquate et la plus aboutie les différentes déterminations de l'agir moral.

Le deuxième moment que nous examinerons est celui dont témoignent les *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion*. D'un point de vue systématique, la religion appartient au cercle de l'esprit absolu, à savoir cette sphère en laquelle l'esprit «revient en lui-même» et réfléchit sur son rapport au divin, à l'universel et à sa plus haute destination. Dans les *Leçons*, Hegel développe son analyse dans le cadre d'un propos qui porte sur la représentation religieuse du bien et du mal, telle que l'illustre l'histoire du péché originel dans le récit de la Genèse.

Chacun de ces moments fait apparaître les termes d'une conception qui place le mal au cœur de la vie, de l'action et de liberté humaines. Mais, pour véritablement faire droit à une telle conception, le mal, soutient Hegel, ne doit pas être compris comme un terme fixement opposé au bien. Au contraire, le mal doit être conçu comme ce qu'il appelle, dans la *Science de la logique*, un «opposé» ou un «contradictoire» (*ein Gegensatz*), c'est-à-dire un terme qui ne trouve sa réalité et son sens complet que dans le rapport concret qu'il entretient avec son contraire.

Hegel, Kant et la moralité

Comme nous venons de le mentionner, la partie des *Principes de la philosophie du droit* consacrée à la moralité (§ 105-141) constitue un des moments importants de l'analyse hégélienne du bien et du mal. Cette partie succède à celle qui porte sur le «droit abstrait» (§ 34-104) et qui traite de l'action en tant qu'elle vise l'acquisition d'objets et elle précède celle où Hegel s'intéresse plus spécifiquement aux institutions (familiale, sociale et étatique) au sein desquelles se déroule l'action humaine (§ 142-360). La sphère de la moralité se caractérise en ceci, qu'en elle le sujet détermine lui-même la maxime de son action. Cependant, il n'en reste pas moins que son action se heurte au monde extérieur au sein duquel elle entreprend de s'objectiver. De façon un peu plus précise, le sujet moral ou le sujet «post-antique et moderne»⁵ a certes la liberté de déterminer le contenu ou la maxime de son action. Mais il a, en retour, la responsabilité d'en assumer les effets, du moins, ceux qu'il a bel et bien voulu, à savoir, précise Hegel, qu'il ne «reconnait comme sien que ce qui, de [son] acte, résidait dans son propos (*Vorsatz*) (GPR, § 117, 217/215). Or, étant donné que ce sujet se propose d'agir en s'abstrayant de toute règle ou norme objectivement instituée, il s'ensuit que sa maxime ne peut être, en fait, que partiellement fondée. Aux yeux de Hegel, ceci constitue la contradiction et, à vrai dire, l'insuffisance inhérente à l'agir de type moral.

Dans le cours de son propos, Hegel fait progressivement apparaître les termes de cette insuffisance qui, pour ainsi dire, se révélera dans toute son ampleur dans la troisième et dernière section de ce chapitre intitulé «Le Bien et la conscience morale» (*Das Gute und das Gewissen*). Le fil conducteur de son analyse est celui du sujet agissant qui se rapporte à son objet et qui, ce faisant, se transforme et transforme le monde. Plus précisément, l'analyse de Hegel s'attache à rendre compte du processus en vertu duquel le sujet agissant conquiert son autonomie et affirme sa liberté contre l'hétéronomie de son objet. Ainsi, après avoir examiné en un premier temps (§ 115-118) un type d'action par lequel un sujet réagit, en quelque sorte, de façon immédiate à une réalité qui se présente comme étant «donnée» ou «présupposée» (*vorausgesetzt*), et après avoir analysé, en un deuxième temps (§ 119-128), un agir qui

5. Utilisés par Gilles Marmasse, ces termes qualifient adéquatement, estimons-nous, le sujet agissant à l'analyse duquel Hegel se livre dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*. En effet, ce sujet est bien celui qui, émergeant de l'effondrement de la cité grecque ancienne et du monde romain, prend conscience de sa liberté et entreprend de la réaliser sous les normes du «droit abstrait» et de «la moralité» et ce, au sein des institutions spécifiquement modernes que sont la famille, la société civile et l'État. Voir G. W. Friedrich HEGEL, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, dans *Werke*, Bd. 7, éd. Eva MOLDENHAUER et Karl Markus MICHEL, Francfort/Main, Surhkamp, 1986, § 124, p. 233, trad. par Jean-François KERVÉGAN, *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, Paris, PUF, 2004, § 124, p. 221. Par la suite, l'abréviation *GPR* sera utilisée, suivie de la pagination de la version originale allemande, puis de la pagination de la traduction française, séparée par une barre oblique.

est porté par un projet ou une intention (*eine Absicht*) du sujet lui-même, Hegel se tourne enfin du côté du *Gewissen*, c'est-à-dire de la conscience morale au sens plein du terme. Ici, le sujet agit pour réaliser le bien : « pour la volonté subjective – affirme Hegel au paragraphe § 131 –, le Bien est tout simplement l'essentiel » (GPR, § 131, 244/226). De plus, le bien est une exigence qui s'impose comme une fin, uniquement et exclusivement en vue du devoir, et non en tant qu'il serait un moyen pour l'atteinte du bien-être ou du bonheur du sujet. C'est cette idée que Hegel exprime au paragraphe 133 par une formule en apparence tautologique selon laquelle « l'obligation (*Pflicht*) doit être mise en œuvre en raison de l'obligation (*Pflicht*) » (GPR, § 133, 250/229). À l'évidence, l'universalité du bien moral que Hegel évoque ici fait écho à la loi pratique pure telle que théorisée par Kant. Et de fait, dans la remarque qu'il fait au paragraphe § 135, Hegel reconnaît à Kant le mérite d'avoir fourni à la moralité « son fondement et son point de départ solides » (GPR, § 135, 252/230).

Cela étant, il n'en demeure pas moins, soutient Hegel, que le devoir moral, reste une norme qui, en soi, est abstraite, formelle et vide. Contrairement à une norme objectivée et incarnée dans une des institutions de la « vie éthique » – que ce soit la famille, la société civile ou l'État – l'obligation morale, affirme-t-il, n'a « pour détermination sienne [que] l'identité dépourvue de contenu ou le positif abstrait, l'absence de détermination » (GPR, § 135, 252/230). Autrement dit, comme il l'avait tout d'abord fait dans son essai de 1802 portant le droit naturel et, ensuite, dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* et dans l'*Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques*, Hegel s'oppose ici à Kant en récusant l'idée que la loi morale ou l'impératif catégorique est, à lui seul, en mesure de générer une quelconque règle de l'action permettant de guider un sujet agissant. Plus précisément, un sujet ne peut, sur la seule base de l'exigence d'universalité du devoir, distinguer entre deux maximes opposées, celle qui est moralement valide de celle qui ne l'est pas. En fait, il appert que les deux maximes peuvent, au nom du même bien moral, être justifiées ou invalidées⁶. Pour Hegel, la moralité se révèle donc profondément contradictoire et insuffisante, car elle exige que le sujet agissant s'abstirra de tout contenu éthique et qu'il s'élève à l'universalité de la loi, mais, ce faisant, ce sujet se retrouve dans une situation où il n'est plus en mesure, sur la base de ses seules ressources subjectives, d'engendrer la maxime qui lui permettrait ainsi d'agir moralement.

6. Dans la remarque qu'il fait au paragraphe 135, Hegel reprend un exemple qu'il avait discuté dans son essai sur le droit naturel et dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* qui est celui du respect de la propriété. À cet égard, il s'emploie à démontrer que la propriété ne peut trouver sa légitimité morale que sur la base d'une condition préalable et qui est celle d'un « monde » en lequel elle est considérée ainsi. (GPR, § 135, 253/231)

Et, c'est, bien sûr, en approfondissant les termes de cette contradiction que l'analyse de Hegel en vient à aborder la notion du mal⁷. Ainsi, dans le cadre de l'agir moral, le choix d'une maxime, soutient-il, est nécessairement et exclusivement le fait du sujet agissant: «en raison de la manière d'être abstraite du Bien, l'autre moment de l'Idée, la particularité en général, tombe dans la subjectivité, laquelle [...] est [...] ce qui est déterminant et décisif» (*GPR*, § 136, 254/231). Or, dans la mesure où sa décision est, à chaque fois, nécessairement particulière, il s'ensuit que ce sujet se retrouve face à une tension, voire même une contradiction, puisqu'il est censé se décider uniquement pour le devoir ou l'universel. Dit autrement, le sujet qui, au départ, veut réaliser le bien doit, pour ce faire, tenir compte des déterminations particulières qui sont propres à la situation dans laquelle il veut agir. Mais, ceci signifie alors qu'il doit forcément renoncer à la pure universalité de la loi et du devoir.

Face à cette difficulté, le sujet, soutient Hegel, réagit en se tournant vers lui-même et en vient ainsi à se comprendre comme étant lui-même la source du devoir universel: «Cette subjectivité [...] met en déroute toute déterminté du droit, de l'obligation [...] tout comme elle est la puissance judicative de déterminer à partir d'elle seule quelle sorte de contenu est bon» (*GPR*, § 138, 260-261/233). Selon Hegel, c'est ce rôle accru de sa subjectivité qui conduit l'agent à s'assigner, pour ainsi dire, arbitrairement un statut supérieur au bien. Et à ses yeux, cette absolutisation de la subjectivité ou ce «subjectivisme» qui, pour ainsi dire, émerge et prend forme à même l'expérience de la conscience morale n'est rien d'autre que la possibilité du mal.

Dans les derniers paragraphes du chapitre consacré à la moralité, notamment au paragraphe 139 et, tout particulièrement, dans la longue remarque du paragraphe 140, Hegel aborde différentes formes que peut prendre le mal proprement moral. Pour lui, la forme, pour ainsi dire, suprême du mal moral est l'hypocrisie: cette dernière, n'hésite-t-il pas à dire, est la «forme ultime du Mal, la plus abstruse» (*GPR*, § 140, 265/236). En effet, précise-t-il, dans sa forme la plus aboutie, l'hypocrisie n'est pas qu'un mal agir ou un «agir méchamment» accompagné d'une mauvaise conscience morale. Elle n'est pas, non plus, uniquement ce qu'il décrit comme une forme de perversion de la conscience morale qu'il associe au «probabilisme» et qui conduit le sujet agissant, à défaut de pouvoir s'appuyer sur le devoir universel, à se décider en faveur d'une raison parmi celles qui apparaissent les meilleures ou les plus probables. Pour Hegel, la conscience hypocrite, dans sa forme la plus achevée, affirme bel et bien sans ambages qu'elle veut le bien et s'attache à convaincre autrui qu'elle est bonne, consciencieuse et soucieuse du devoir. Mais, en réalité, ce que cette conscience veut faire passer comme étant conforme au devoir n'est

7. D'ailleurs, à ce propos, pour Hegel, comme pour Kant, le mal est dans son essence d'ordre moral, et non de nature «métaphysique» ou «naturelle». Sur ce point, voir l'article de Timothy BROWNLEE, «Hegel's Moral Concept of Evil», *Dialogue*, 52 (2013), p. 81-108.

que l'absolutisation de sa subjectivité particulière. Se produit donc ici, soutient Hegel, un renversement ou une inversion en bonne et due forme du bien moral : la subjectivité, qui est le particulier, est absolutisée et élevée au rang de l'universel, tandis que le Bien ou le devoir qui est l'universel est, pour ainsi dire, rabaissee et compris comme étant dépendant de la subjectivité. Dans les termes utilisés par Hegel : l'hypocrisie est une forme par laquelle « le mal est perverti en Bien et le Bien en Mal » (*GPR*, § 140, 265/236).

Un certain nombre de points communs apparaissent ici entre la conception hégélienne du mal qui, dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, se présente sous les traits plus spécifiques de l'hypocrisie et celle que Kant a développée dans son essai portant sur « le mal radical » (1792-1793). Un premier point commun est celui qui a trait à la source ou l'origine du mal. Pour Kant, le mal a son origine dans un penchant (*Hang*) inhérent à la nature humaine dont le fondement est, pour nous, insondable (*unerforschlich*), et en vertu duquel le libre-arbitre (*Willkür*) choisit d'adhérer à une maxime contraire ou opposée au devoir et à la loi morale⁸. De son côté, Hegel, on vient de le voir, situe le mal dans la conscience ou la subjectivité humaine et au paragraphe § 139 des *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, il affirme que « l'origine du mal en général réside dans le mystère de la liberté » (*GPR*, § 139, 261/234). Un second point commun a à voir avec la compréhension du mal en tant que tel. Pour Kant, le mal consiste en « une inversion de l'ordre éthique » ou en « une subordination des maximes » de la moralité à celles de l'intérêt privé et de l'amour propre⁹. Pour sa part, Hegel, nous venons également de le souligner, conçoit le mal dans les termes d'un subjectivisme, c'est-à-dire d'un processus en vertu duquel la volonté en vient à se comprendre comme étant elle-même la source du contenu éthique.

Certes, il est dans l'ordre des choses, dira-t-on, que la conception du mal exposée par Hegel dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit* révèle de telles similitudes avec celle de Kant. Car, à ses yeux, Kant, on l'a dit, est le philosophe qui est parvenu à définir avec le plus d'exactitude les déterminations de la moralité. Pourtant, une lecture attentive révèle un désaccord important à propos de la notion du mal et ce désaccord est lié ou est semblable à celui que Hegel exprime face à la philosophie morale de Kant dans son ensemble¹⁰. En effet, Kant est sans doute celui qui a le mieux défini la moralité, mais il n'en demeure pas moins, estime Hegel, qu'il a commis l'erreur d'avoir injustement absolutisé cette sphère et de lui avoir assigné un fondement nouménal et

8. Immanuel KANT, *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, dans *Oeuvres philosophiques III. Les derniers écrits* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), trad. Alexis PHILONENKO, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 37-70, [VI, 26-53].

9. Immanuel KANT, *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, p. 50, [VI, 36].

10. D'ailleurs dans la remarque faite au paragraphe 135 Hegel renvoie lui-même à sa critique de la moralité kantienne qu'il a développée dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* et dans l'*Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques* (*GPR*, § 135, 253 /231).

suprasensible, alors qu'il aurait plutôt dû la voir comme un moment de la réalisation de l'esprit qui trouve son fondement dans le réseau historiquement institué de «la vie éthique» (*Sittlichkeit*)¹¹. De façon analogue, la philosophie kantienne de la moralité, selon Hegel, commet l'erreur de concevoir le bien et le mal comme des notions qui renvoient à des termes contraires, fixes et distincts l'un de l'autre. Pour lui, le bien et le mal doivent plutôt être compris comme des «opposés» ou comme ce que, dans la *Science de la logique*, il appelle également des «contradictoires», des *Gegensätze*, c'est-à-dire des moments appartenant à un seul et même processus «logique».

De fait, dans la partie de la *Science de la logique* consacrée à la «doctrine de l'essence», Hegel s'attache à montrer comment l'entendement (*der Verstand*), en se «représentant» (*vorstellend*) des notions qui lui apparaissent comme des termes fixes et contraires, s'empêtre dans des contradictions et des insuffisances insurmontables¹². À ses yeux, ces insuffisances découlent justement du fait que l'entendement les comprend uniquement comme des entités qui sont fixement séparées, qui sont extérieures l'une à l'autre ou, selon les termes de Hegel, qui sont vus comme des «unités avec soi subsistantes-par-soi, étant pour soi» (*selbständige*) (WL II, 58/55). Dans le cours de son propos, Hegel examine un certain nombre de binômes ou de couples conceptuels, dont, bien sûr, celui de l'«identité» et de la «différence», mais aussi les couples formés

11. Une abondante littérature a été consacrée à cette critique hégélienne de la moralité kantienne. Pour une analyse récente portant sur cette critique telle qu'elle est exposée dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, voir Gilles MARMASSE, *Force et fragilité des normes. Principes de la philosophie du droit*, Paris, P.U.F., 2011, p. 98-105. Voir également, Antoine GRANDJEAN, «Conscience morale et certitude de soi dans les *Principes de Hegel*», *Revue de Métaphysique et de morale*, 40 (2003), p. 513-528. Aussi, Ido GEIGER, *The Founding Act of Modern Ethical Life: Hegel's Critique of Kant's Moral and Political Philosophy*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007. Enfin, pour une analyse liant cette critique hégélienne de la moralité kantienne à la notion du mal, voir Philippe SOUAL, «La moralité et le mal dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit* de Hegel», *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 186 (1996), p. 223-264.

12. À ce propos, il est bien connu que, dès ses premiers écrits philosophiques, notamment dans son écrit sur *la différence entre les systèmes philosophiques de Fichte et de Schelling* et dans *Foi et savoir*, Hegel décrivait la philosophie de Kant comme étant l'expression d'une pensée de l'entendement (*Verstandphilosophie*) ou de la réflexion (*Reflexionsphilosophie*). Aussi s'attachait-il à démontrer que cette philosophie révèle diverses insuffisances qui renvoient toutes au fait que Kant pense l'ensemble des notions ou des concepts constitutifs de son système philosophique en termes de dualismes fixes et séparés, sans voir que les termes qui forment ces dualismes ne prennent leur véritable sens que dans les rapports qui les unissent: cf. G.W. Friedrich HEGEL, *La différence entre les systèmes philosophiques de Fichte et de Schelling*, trad. par Bernard Gilson, Paris, Vrin, 1976, p. 100-134; *Foi et savoir*, trad. par Alexis PHILONENKO, Paris, Vrin, p. 103-127. Dans la *Science de la logique*, Hegel développe l'analyse à laquelle nous nous rapportons dans le deuxième chapitre de la doctrine de l'essence intitulé «Les essentialités ou les déterminations-de-réflexions». Voir G. W. Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II, Erster Teil. Die Objektive Logik. Zweites Buch. Zweiter Teil. Die Subjektive Logik*, dans *Werke*, Bd. 6, éd. Eva MOLDENHAUER et K. Markus MICHEL, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 35-80; trad. par Bernard Bourgeois, *Science de la logique. Livre deuxième. L'essence*, Paris, Vrin, 2016, p. 37-74. Par la suite, l'abréviation WL II sera utilisée, suivie de la pagination de la version originale allemande, puis de la pagination de la traduction française, séparée par une barre oblique.

du « positif » et du « négatif », de l'« égalité » et de l'« inégalité », de la « vérité » et de l'« erreur », de la « vertu » et du « vice », de même que celui qui est composé des termes du « bien » et du « mal ». Or, pour Hegel, chacun de ces binômes est formé de termes qui, tout en étant opposés l'un à l'autre, n'acquièrent, en fait, leur sens qu'en rapport à leur opposé. L'identité n'est identité que, parce qu'en s'affirmant comme identité, elle pose, du coup, une différence à laquelle elle s'oppose. Inversement, la différence n'acquiert son sens que par l'entremise du même processus, c'est-à-dire qu'en s'affirmant comme différence, elle pose du coup une identité à laquelle elle s'oppose. Il en est également ainsi des binômes composés des termes de « positif » et de « négatif », d'« égalité » et d'« inégalité » et, aux yeux de Hegel, il en est aussi exactement de même des binômes qui comprennent les termes de vérité et d'erreur, de vertu et de vice et ceux du bien et du mal. Selon lui, seule la « raison » (*die Vernunft*) ou la pensée qu'il qualifie de spéculative est en mesure de concevoir ces binômes, à la fois, dans leurs oppositions et dans leur unité, c'est-à-dire dans les rapports que ces termes entretiennent avec leurs opposés respectifs et qui, ce faisant, les définissent et leur donnent leur véritable sens.

Dans le contexte des *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, une telle conception spéculative du bien et du mal est suggérée par la formulation que nous venons d'évoquer selon laquelle le subjectivisme moral, dans sa forme la plus aboutie qu'est l'hypocrisie, opère un renversement du bien en mal et du mal en bien. De même, c'est cette même conception que Hegel exprime en soutenant que la subjectivité qui s'affirme comme étant elle-même la source du bien n'est, en fait, nulle autre que mal. (GPR, § 139, 261/234).

Cela étant, Hegel ne développe pas cette conception « processuelle » et « oppositionnelle » – spéculative – du bien et du mal dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*. Dans cet ouvrage, il s'attache plutôt à démontrer comment l'esprit réalise sa liberté en objectivant ce qu'il appelle la norme du droit (*Recht*) dans les différentes institutions de la vie éthique que sont la famille, la société civile et l'État et comment, ce faisant, ces institutions peuvent, sinon éradiquer le mal – qui est proprement impossible à éliminer –, du moins l'endiguer ou le contenir. Toutefois Hegel approfondit bel et bien les termes de cette conception des rapports du bien et du mal dans ses *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion*. Aussi est-ce maintenant vers elles que nous nous tournons.

2. Les *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion*: le bien, le mal et « le récit » de la Chute

Cette conception, Hegel l'expose dans la troisième et dernière partie des *Leçons consacrée au christianisme* qui, à ses yeux, est « la religion accomplie » (*die vollendete Religion*). Son propos porte sur ce qu'il appelle « l'humanité naturelle » et s'attache à rendre compte de ce qu'il juge être la vérité philosophique

de ce que le langage de la représentation religieuse illustre dans l'histoire de la Chute ou du péché originel, telle que racontée dans les premières sections de la Genèse. Plus précisément, Hegel s'emploie à expliciter les termes de ce qu'il estime être le « noyau » conceptuel de l'histoire de la Chute en récusant une fausse alternative qui s'est, pour ainsi dire, dégagée des différentes interprétations de cette histoire. Cette alternative oppose, d'un côté, un optimisme anthropologique qui affirme que l'homme est bon par nature et, de l'autre, un pessimisme anthropologique qui, à l'inverse, soutient que l'homme est méchant par nature. Et comme l'ont souligné certains commentateurs, l'analyse et la réfutation que Hegel propose de cette alternative s'appuient principalement sur sa reformulation de la distinction aristotélicienne entre *dynamis*, *energeia* et entéléchie en termes « d'en soi », « pour soi » et « d'en soi et pour soi » qu'il explicite dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* et dans la *Science de la logique*¹³.

Ainsi, Hegel commence son analyse par l'examen de la proposition « optimiste » selon laquelle l'homme est bon par nature, car c'est le point de vue, dit-il, « qui plus ou moins prédomine à [son] époque »¹⁴. Conformément à la représentation religieuse, cette proposition ne peut pas être la seule valide, car cela signifierait, soutient-il, que l'homme n'est pas « scindé », « qu'il n'éprouve pas le besoin de la réconciliation » et que toute la démarche qui est illustrée dans l'histoire de la Chute est superflue. Certes, « l'homme est bon » est une proposition nécessairement vraie, car il est dit que l'homme est rationalité, qu'il a été créé à l'image de Dieu et que ce dernier est esprit et bonté. Toutefois, il reste que le « par nature » qui accompagne la formulation optimiste est ambigu et peut, selon Hegel, être précisé ainsi : « l'homme est bon par nature » veut dire qu'il est bon en soi, d'un point de vue conceptuel. Mais, cela signifie alors qu'il n'est bon qu'en soi, c'est-à-dire que sa bonté n'est « qu'intérieure », qu'elle n'est pas effective, actualisée ou, en d'autres mots, que la bonté naturelle de l'homme est une bonté en puissance. En effet, étant donné que l'homme n'est pas seulement une nature physique, mais qu'à l'image de Dieu il est aussi esprit et que l'esprit, par définition, « doit dépasser [sa naturalité et] son immédiateté » (VPR 3, 222/216) afin de se réaliser, alors il en est de même de la bonté de l'homme. Cette dernière n'est donc pas immédiatement réalisée, mais elle

13. Voir Nicholas ADAMS, *The Eclipse of Grace. Divine and Human Action in Hegel*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 5-6. À propos des rapports que la logique de Hegel (et l'ensemble de sa philosophie) entretient avec celle d'Aristote, voir Alfredo FERRARIN, *Hegel and Aristotle*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

14. G.W. Friedrich HEGEL, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, Teil 3. Die vollen-dete Religion*, éd. Walter JAESCHKE, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984, p. 221, trad. par Pierre GARNIRON avec la collaboration de Gilles MARMASSE, *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion. Troisième partie. La religion accomplie*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2004, p. 215. Par la suite, l'abréviation VPR 3 sera utilisée suivie de la pagination de la version originale allemande puis de la traduction française séparée par une barre oblique.

doit l'être: elle doit passer de la puissance à l'actualité, de l'en-soi du concept au pour-soi de sa réalisation ou de la nature à l'esprit.

Autrement dit, le «par nature» qui qualifie la bonté de l'homme apparaît comme étant également l'expression d'un pas-encore-réalisé, d'un devoir-être ou d'un manque. Or, c'est justement ce manque ou cette «négativité» qui va conduire à Hegel à se tourner vers la proposition pessimiste selon laquelle l'homme est méchant par nature. Cela étant, on serait porté à croire que Hegel expliquerait le rapport ou plutôt le passage entre la conception optimiste à la pessimiste de la façon suivante: l'homme est bon par nature, mais, étant donné sa finitude et la faiblesse de sa volonté, c'est en entreprenant de sortir de sa naturalité afin de réaliser sa bonté qu'il commettrait inévitablement le mal. Après tout, une telle explication est, pour l'essentiel, conforme à une interprétation assez répandue de l'histoire de la Chute et, de plus, elle semblerait confirmée par le motif de la théodicée que Hegel évoque dans sa philosophie de l'histoire pour rendre compte du rapport entre, d'une part, la réalisation de la raison et de la liberté dans l'histoire et le mal, la souffrance et la douleur qui jalonnent cette histoire, d'autre part. Or, telle n'est pas la lecture qu'il propose. En fait, Hegel veut plutôt faire entièrement droit à la thèse d'après laquelle l'homme est mauvais ou méchant par nature. Bien sûr, son argumentation exploite derechef l'ambiguïté inhérente au terme de nature.

L'être humain, réitère-il, est sans doute naturellement bon, mais il ne doit pas en rester à la nature. Pour l'être spirituel qu'est l'humain, la nature désigne un potentiel non réalisé et, en ce sens, une scission entre la potentialité et l'actualité, entre l'être et le devoir-être. Par ailleurs, la nature renvoie également à ce qu'il y a de naturel en lui et s'oppose à sa rationalité et à sa spiritualité. En ce dernier sens, agir selon la nature veut dire, pour un être humain, agir selon ses passions, ses inclinations, ses instincts, ses désirs. Dit autrement, agir selon la nature, c'est agir comme un animal et l'être humain fait effectivement partie du règne animal. Cependant, un tel agir est, bien sûr, profondément insatisfaisant et insuffisant, car il ne se conçoit pas uniquement comme un animal; il n'est pas seulement un être naturel, mais il est aussi spirituel. De façon plus précise, l'agir animal, parce qu'il est naturel, est innocent; il n'est donc ni bon ni mauvais. Il n'est que l'œuvre de la volonté naturelle, des désirs ou des instincts et, par conséquent, son auteur n'en est pas responsable ou n'en est pas imputable. En contrepartie, l'être humain, parce qu'il est esprit et rationalité, est ou, plus exactement, doit vouloir être responsable et imputable. Ses actions doivent bel et bien être les siennes et il doit vouloir en assumer la responsabilité. Il y va, dira-t-on, de son humanité même:

L'exigence absolue est que l'homme ne persévère pas dans l'état de volonté naturelle, d'être naturel. Il est certes aussitôt conscience, mais il n'en peut pas moins être en tant qu'homme un être naturel, dans la mesure où le naturel constitue la fin, le contenu, la détermination de son vouloir. Il faut regarder de plus près cette

détermination : l'homme est homme en tant que sujet, et en tant que sujet naturel il est ce sujet singulier, et sa volonté est cette volonté singulière, elle est remplie du contenu de la singularité. Cela signifie que l'homme naturel est égoïste. Mais, de l'homme dit «bon», nous exigeons au moins qu'il se règle d'après des déterminations universelles, des lois. La naturalité de la volonté est plus précisément l'égoïsme de la volonté; en tant que naturelle la volonté de l'homme est particulière, différente de l'universalité de la volonté et opposée à la rationalité formée à l'universalité (VPR 3, 223/217).

En somme, la proposition selon laquelle l'homme est mauvais par nature doit être comprise comme voulant dire que l'homme est mauvais lorsqu'il se fixe à sa naturalité, à son «égoïsme» et refuse de s'élever à l'universalité afin de réaliser sa spiritualité. Mais, si cela est juste, alors il en résulte que les deux propositions opposées selon lesquelles l'homme est bon par nature et l'homme est mauvais par nature ne s'excluent aucunement l'une l'autre. En effet, l'analyse de ces deux propositions révèle qu'il est inexact de les poser dans les termes d'une alternative puisqu'elles sont, en réalité, complémentaires. Comme nous venons de le voir, il est vrai de dire que l'homme est bon par nature puisqu'il est en soi spirituel, mais il est également vrai de dire qu'il est naturellement mauvais puisque sa nature l'oppose à sa spiritualité et peut le fixer à sa naturalité et à sa singularité. Toutefois, une telle complémentarité n'implique pas qu'elle serait l'expression d'une conception selon laquelle «l'homme est tout autant bon que méchant» (VPR 3, 224/218). Une telle position, estime Hegel, est tout aussi inexacte et, à vrai dire, tout aussi superficielle que celles qui se dégagent de l'alternative entre l'optimisme et le pessimisme anthropologique. En fait, ces deux propositions doivent être comprises comme des «opposées», des *Gegensätze*, à savoir, comme nous l'avons vu plus haut, des propositions qui se presupposent l'une l'autre et qui ne prennent leur véritable sens que dans les rapports qui les unissent.

Pour Hegel, telle est, dans ses grandes articulations conceptuelles et philosophiques, la conception qui, dans la Genèse, est illustrée dans le langage de la représentation religieuse. De fait, selon les termes de cette histoire, au début l'homme, créé à l'image de Dieu, vivait dans le paradis. En des termes également imagés, Hegel reformule ce propos en écrivant que cela revient à dire qu'au paradis, l'homme vivait dans un «jardin zoologique» (VPR 3, 224/218), suggérant par là que cet «état» ou ce «lieu» en est un en lequel l'homme mène une vie naturelle, animale, innocente et, pour ainsi dire, en deçà du bien et du mal. Toutefois, on vient de le voir, cela signifie également que l'homme, en tant qu'il n'est pas seulement naturel, mais aussi spirituel et bon, n'est encore qu'en soi, qu'en puissance. En ce lieu, l'homme est donc, en quelque sorte, un manque, un déficit par rapport à lui-même et, bien sûr, dans l'histoire de la Genèse, il est dit qu'il entreprend de combler ce manque en transgressant le commandement divin et en mangeant du fruit de l'arbre de la connaissance du bien et du mal.

Selon Hegel, la « faute » ou « le péché » ne se situe pas dans le fruit comme tel, mais plutôt dans l'acte de « manger » de l'arbre de la connaissance du bien et du mal. Car, cet acte est bien celui par lequel l'homme sort de son en-soi et entreprend de s'actualiser en tant qu'esprit et bonté. Toutefois, il ne s'est pas encore réalisé comme être spirituel, mais ne s'est élevé qu'à la connaissance du bien et du mal. Ce qui veut dire qu'il se trouve, en quelque sorte, dans « l'entre-deux » ou, plus exactement, dans la scission, la séparation ou l'opposition de l'en-soi et du pour-soi, de la puissance et de l'actualité. Or, pour Hegel, cette scission ou cette séparation qui caractérise ce « lieu » de la connaissance n'est nulle autre que celle du mal. Autrement dit, donc, la connaissance du bien et du mal est le mal. Dans les termes utilisés par Hegel :

Cela signifie positivement que l'homme s'est élevé à la connaissance du bien et du mal, et que cette connaissance, que la différence est la source du mal, le mal lui-même. L'être-mal est mis dans l'acte de connaître, dans la conscience [...] Le connaître est la source du mal. En effet, connaître, ou en général conscience [*Bewusstsein*], signifie cet acte de juger [*ur-teilen*], de se différencier en soi-même. Les animaux n'ont aucune conscience, ils n'ont pas ce différencier d'eux-mêmes en eux-mêmes, ils n'ont aucun être-pour-soi libre par rapport à l'objectivité en général [...] Mais la scission est le mal, elle est la contradiction; elle contient les deux côtés, le bien et le mal. C'est dans cette scission seulement que le mal est contenu et c'est pourquoi elle est le mal. Il est donc tout à fait exact que c'est premièrement dans la conscience que l'on trouve le bien et le mal (VPR 3, 225/ 219).

Cela dit, il ne faudrait pas en conclure ici que Hegel, en affirmant que la connaissance du bien et du mal est le mal, soutient en fait que le mal est inévitable et nécessaire. Ce qui est nécessaire et inévitable, ce n'est pas le mal en tant que tel, mais bien la possibilité du mal, c'est-à-dire le fait que l'être humain, en raison de sa conscience, de sa liberté, en un mot parce qu'il est un être spirituel, fait l'expérience de la scission, de la séparation ou de la contradiction qui, elle, n'est nulle autre que la condition du mal.

Par ailleurs, poursuivant, son analyse, Hegel se tourne vers le deuxième arbre qui apparaît dans le récit de la Genèse et qui est celui de la vie. Ces deux arbres – celui de la connaissance du bien et du mal et celui de la vie – sont les représentations de deux aspirations ou de deux désirs humains fondamentaux. Le premier désir, qui est représenté par l'arbre de la connaissance, est celui de vivre une vie en harmonie, en unité avec la nature extérieure. Mais, seul l'animal demeure en une telle unité, alors que l'homme doit s'en extirper. Quant au deuxième désir, il est celui de vivre éternellement – de l'immortalité –, mais l'arbre de la vie rappelle qu'il n'est qu'un désir, de sorte que l'homme est privé d'en goûter les fruits. Ensemble, ces deux arbres affirment que l'homme doit connaître – et que, par conséquent, il doit sortir et s'élever au-dessus de son existence naturelle et animale – et qu'il doit donc mourir.

Ici, Hegel rejette l'interprétation théologique d'inspiration paulinienne selon laquelle l'origine de la mort est le péché et si l'homme n'avait pas goûté au fruit de l'arbre de la connaissance, il vivrait pour toujours, puisque le fruit de l'arbre de la vie reste intact. À ses yeux, la juste interprétation est plutôt que «l'homme n'est immortel que par le connaître : car c'est seulement en tant que pensant qu'il n'est pas une âme mortelle, animale, mais une âme pure, libre» (VPR 3, 227/221). Autrement dit, précise-t-il, le connaître, c'est-à-dire, le «devenir-conscient», le «scinder» et le «juger» (*ur-teilen*) sont ce par quoi l'être humain s'élève à sa spiritualité et transcende sa mortalité et son animalité. Ou, si l'on reformule les choses autrement, être humain, selon Hegel, ce n'est pas seulement subir ou souffrir du manque ou de la scission entre la bonté potentielle ou en soi et l'impossibilité effective de la réaliser, mais c'est connaître, «savoir» que nous incarnons cette scission.

Et à ses yeux, un tel savoir, une telle connaissance est, en fait, l'expression de ce qui constitue assurément le paradoxe ou l'ironie humaine la plus fondamentale : la connaissance met certes fin à l'innocence en éveillant la conscience du bien et du mal, mais cette conscience s'accompagne nécessairement de celle selon laquelle la condition de la connaissance du bien est de savoir que nous en sommes séparés. Pour Hegel, c'est cette conscience, cette expérience de la séparation et du manque qui, pourrait-on dire, est l'aiguillon de sa douleur, de son malheur et qui éveille, en lui, le besoin de la réconciliation¹⁵.

* * *

En somme – et nous terminerons sur ces remarques récapitulatives –, pour Hegel, le mal n'est ni une force obscure menaçante ni un choix métaphysique originel. À l'instar de Kant, il conçoit le mal comme relevant de la liberté humaine, comme appartenant au «mystère de la liberté», ce qui implique, on l'a vu, qu'il doit être imputé à l'homme et à lui seul. Cependant, selon Hegel, le mal n'a pas à être compris comme ayant sa source dans un principe, pour nous, insondable, situé dans le caractère intelligible de l'homme. De façon plus prosaïque et un peu moins mystérieuse, dirions-nous, Hegel développe une conception selon laquelle l'homme, pour se réaliser en tant qu'être spirituel, doit sortir de son innocence naturelle, mais cette sortie est une séparation, une scission douloureuse qui, on vient de le voir, éveille en lui le besoin de la réconciliation.

De plus, contrairement à Kant, le mal ne résulte pas, soutient Hegel, d'une décision du libre arbitre consistant à choisir le mal contre le bien. À ses yeux, le seul fait de se retrouver dans une situation, une position où l'on a à choisir

15. Peter Hodgson associe ce paradoxe – à juste titre, croyons-nous – à une conception tragique de la nature humaine. Voir Peter HODGSON, *Hegel and Christian Theology. A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 151.

entre faire le bien ou le mal est déjà le mal. Autrement dit, il n'existe pas un «lieu» ou une position, en quelque sorte, «neutre» à partir de laquelle nous pourrions délibérer et choisir entre le bien et le mal, compris comme deux «entités» fixes, séparées et délimitées. Ce que l'homme peut choisir, c'est de perdurer dans la scission, de se fixer à la naturalité dans laquelle il est, pour ainsi dire, toujours déjà ou, encore, entreprendre de s'élever à sa nature spirituelle et au bien. En d'autres mots, pour Hegel, le mal n'est pas, avec le bien, un des deux choix auxquels fait face l'être humain, mais il est plutôt ce à quoi il peut se fixer ou ce contre quoi il peut entreprendre de réaliser sa nature spirituelle. Dans les *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, Hegel développe cette idée dans les termes d'une conception qu'on a qualifiée «d'oppositionnelle» et de «spéculative» des rapports entre le bien et le mal. Dans les *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion*, il expose cette conception dans le cadre d'une analyse de l'histoire de la Chute au cours de laquelle il soutient que la connaissance du bien et du mal est le mal.

Enfin – et nous reprenons ici, en le reformulant –, le propos de George di Giovanni qui soutient que, pour Kant, l'homme commet le mal en dépit du bien et de la liberté de sa volonté. Ou, en d'autres mots, malgré la liberté de sa volonté (*Wille*), l'être humain – et plus précisément, son libre-arbitre (*Willkür*) – choisit (très souvent!) de commettre le mal. Pour Hegel, en revanche l'être humain est mauvais précisément parce qu'il est rationnel et libre¹⁶. C'est parce qu'il est rationnel et libre qu'il est inévitablement et nécessairement confronté à la possibilité de commettre le mal. Ou, dit autrement: c'est sa liberté qui lui enjoint de sortir de son innocence naturelle, afin de réaliser sa nature spirituelle. Mais c'est cette même liberté qui, ce faisant, produit la scission, la séparation, donc, la possibilité du mal. Mais, alors, contre le mal qu'il a commis l'esprit peut entreprendre de se réconcilier avec lui-même. Telle est, venons-nous de suggérer, le plus profond paradoxe qui, selon Hegel, caractérise la liberté humaine.

Bishop's University
Sherbrooke, QC
Université Saint-Paul
Ottawa, ON

16. Ce propos, que Monsieur di Giovanni nous a aimablement autorisé à reprendre, provient d'une conférence intitulée *Why Faith? Kantian Explorations* qu'il a prononcée lors d'un colloque qui s'est tenu à la Memorial University (Terre-Neuve et Labrador) les 21 et 22 mai 2015.

SOMMAIRE

En comparaison de Kant, de Fichte ou de Schelling, Hegel ne semble pas avoir porté une attention aussi soutenue au problème du mal. Or, une lecture attentive du système hégelien montre plutôt que le mal fait l'objet d'une thématisation en bonne et due forme à des moments décisifs de l'*Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques*. Cet article se propose d'examiner deux de ces moments: le chapitre des *Principes de la philosophie du droit* portant sur «la moralité» et les *Leçons sur la philosophie de la religion*. Nous soutenons la thèse selon laquelle ces moments font apparaître les termes d'une conception qui, à l'instar de la conception kantienne, place le mal au cœur de la vie, de l'agir et de liberté humaines. Mais, pour véritablement faire droit à une telle conception, le mal doit être conçu comme ce que Hegel appelle un «contradictoire» ou un «opposé» (*ein Gegensatz*), c'est-à-dire un terme qui ne trouve son véritable sens que dans le rapport concret qui le lie à son contraire.

SUMMARY

In comparison to Kant, Fichte and Schelling, Hegel appears not to have paid much attention to the problem of evil. Yet, as a close reading of his philosophical system shows, the problem of evil is subject to a state of the art thematization at important moments in the *Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences*. This paper examines two such moments: the chapter of the *Elements of the philosophy of rights* devoted to “morality” and *The Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. We hold that they elucidate the intricacies of Hegel’s conception of evil which, similar to Kantian thought, conceives of evil as being at the core of human life, action and freedom. However, in order to fully comprehend this view, evil ought to be considered as what Hegel calls a “contradic-tory” or an ‘opposite’ (*ein Gegensatz*); a term that only finds its true meaning in a concrete relationship to its opposite term.

EVIL'S INSCRUTABILITY IN ARENDT AND LEVINAS¹

İMGE ORANLI

Since 2001, quite a few volumes in Continental philosophy have been dedicated to the topic of evil. Most of these works make reference to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.² In these studies, the terms "evil" and "terrorism" imply one another, suggesting that the epitome of evil in the 21st century is found in the terrorist acts committed by Islamist³ groups. Although some reject defining terrorism as evil⁴, the common tendency has been to use these terms in conjunction. Observing the parallelism drawn between the terms "evil" and "terrorism" in the Continental literature on evil, my contention is that this parallelism is connected to the idea that evil is an inscrutable phenomenon.⁵

1. This article works through some of the ideas that have been put forward in my PhD dissertation (2015), which partially examines the legacy of Kant's theory of evil in Continental philosophy. I am grateful to Tina Chanter, Nisa Göksel and Elif Yavnik for their helpful comments. I would also like to thank the editors of the special issue, Martin Thibodeau and Joël Madore, for inviting me to contribute, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

2. Some of the most well-known works published since 2001 that refer to 9/11 are as follows: Alan D. SCHRIFFT (ed.) *Modernity and the Problem of Evil*, Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 2005; Susan NEIMAN, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2002; Richard J. BERNSTEIN, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, Malden MA, Blackwell, 2002; Peter DEWS, *The Idea of Evil*, Malden MA, Blackwell, 2008.

3. The term "Islamist," as opposed to "Islamic," has been suggested as a more appropriate term for identifying agents who engage in terrorist violence in the name of Islam, as it refers to "a political ideology that strives to derive legitimacy from Islam." See Soner CAGAPTAY, "Islamist' or 'Islamic'? The Difference is Huge," *The Washington Institute*, July 11, 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/islamist-or-islamic-the-difference-is-huge>.

4. See Terry EAGLETON, *An Essay on Evil*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 159.

5. In the mainstream interpretation, Islamist terrorists are depicted as inscrutable, in the sense of being devoid of rational motives. As cultural anthropologist Talal Asad puts it, "their motives are unexpressed" (*On Suicide Bombing*, New York NY, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 30). Similarly, scholar Marie Breen Smyth suggests that there is "a climate where comprehensive processes of 'othering' and demonizing the 'terrorist' [...] subject" occurs, which then hides the political motivation of these groups" ("Subjectivities, 'suspect communities,' governments, and the ethics of research on 'terrorism'" in Richard JACKSON, Marie BREEN SMYTH and Jeroen GUNNING (eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, New York NY, Routledge, 2009, p.195). Furthermore, Başak Ertür notes that the process of "becoming a terrorist" is

Continental scholars have suggested that we are forced to rethink the category of evil as we face acts of terrorism on a global scale. In light of this suggestion, this paper traces the idea of the “inscrutability of evil” as a common, yet overlooked theme in Continental philosophy. This idea finds its first modern formulation in Kant’s theory of radical evil. Here, I argue that Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas follow Kant in identifying evil as an inscrutable phenomenon. Discerning this theme in their accounts is significant because it underscores that Levinas and Arendt rely on the framework of Kant’s theory of evil, despite the fact that they wish to distance themselves from it. And more importantly, we must attend to evil’s inscrutability, which I argue is a shared theme in Kant’s, Levinas’ and Arendt’s approaches, because it continues to dominate our approach to the question of evil today, and, I think, occludes our thinking, in particular with respect to the phenomenon of global terrorism.

My aim, then, is to reorient Continental scholarship on evil by showing that Kant, Arendt and Levinas all appeal to its inscrutability⁶, although their accounts of why evil is inscrutable differ considerably. Although Arendt’s interpretation of Kant’s notion of radical evil has been a point of dispute among critics⁷, none of the critics have focused upon inscrutability as the common element in Arendt’s and Kant’s accounts of evil.⁸ Neither have critics underscored inscrutability as a shared marker of evil in Levinas’ and Kant’s accounts. While all three thinkers agree that evil cannot be rationalized, integrated into reason, or understood within the framework of a theodicy, for Kant evil is inscrutable because it is grounded in freedom. For Arendt, evil is

explained away with the term “radicalization,” a process which does not disclose the extremely violent social, historical, and geographical contexts within which this radicalization is fostered. She states, “the mainstream institutional approach to “explaining” terrorism has also shifted in the fifteen years [...] after 2004 the concept of “radicalization” began to have currency in policy-making and policing, first in the UK, and soon after in the US. [...] the notion of radicalization is based on the assumption that terrorists come from a wider milieu of non-violent extremism, and that a combination of individual psychological circumstances, and theological and ideological indoctrination turns some extremists into terrorists.” Başak ERTÜR, “The Onus of Thought in the War on Terror,” *Theory & Event*, 20 (2017), p. 70.

6. I focus on the concept of inscrutability as well as relevant senses associated with this term, such as the incomprehensible, inexpressible, and unaccountable.

7. For Arendt’s interpretation of Kant’s notion of radical evil, see Hannah ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York NY, Harcourt Press – Brace & Co., 1951, p. 459. The most well-known criticism of Arendt has been offered by Henry Allison. See Henry E. ALLISON, “Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis,” in Maria Pia LARA (ed.), *Rethinking Evil*, New York NY, Columbia University Press, 2007. Richard Bernstein notes Arendt’s critical relation to Kant on the question of evil; see Richard BERNSTEIN, “Arendt: Radical Evil and the Banality of Evil,” in *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, Malden MA, Polity Press, 2002, p. 208, see also p. 214.

8. Although Bernstein does not suggest evil’s inscrutability as a common theme in Kant’s, Arendt’s and Levinas’ approaches, he does underline “inscrutability” and “incomprehensibility” in his analyses of their accounts. See Richard BERNSTEIN, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, p. 12, see also pp. 44-45 and p. 175.

inscrutable because it is "banal." And for Levinas, evil is inscrutable because it is "excessive" and "useless." My analysis demonstrates that inscrutability is an essential marker of the concept of evil, since it is found in all three accounts as a feature of evil, regardless of the fact that in each account a different type of evil is at stake (moral, political and existential, respectively).

Although they have strikingly different philosophical approaches, both Arendt and Levinas discuss evil's inscrutability within the context of the Holocaust. Arendt locates evil as a profoundly political issue, whereas for Levinas it is at the very core of existence. In distinction from both, Kant speaks of evil as a moral issue—as a problem of how an individual must and must not act. The Kantian doctrine of radical evil, considered on its own, does not provide us with the intellectual tools to grasp the emergence of evil actions in the social sphere because Kant limits the discussion of evil to the adoption of maxims by the individual.⁹ To put it differently, the question of how the individual is politically motivated to engage in evil actions is not addressed in the doctrine of radical evil, because Kant identifies evil as an innate propensity of the human species.

Regardless of their difference from Kant, I argue that Arendt's identification of Nazi evil as banal (i.e., without depth; spreading like a "fungus"¹⁰) and Levinas' description of evil as useless (through his notion of "useless suffering"¹¹) are both developed in the trajectory of thought facilitated by Kant's doctrine of radical evil. This trajectory is marked by two aspects: evil's non-theological nature and its inscrutability.

There is general agreement that Kant's theory of evil is significant because it departs from previous theorizations of evil, which confine it to theodicy. I begin by reviewing Kant's doctrine of radical evil as the first modern account in which the question of evil is treated beyond theodicy. Having outlined how Kant's account of evil moves beyond theodicy, I then go on to suggest that Kant's doctrine of radical evil, and his ethical commitments in general,

9. Although in isolation Kant's doctrine of radical evil limits the discussion of evil to the individual, there have been attempts to connect the doctrine of radical evil to Kant's anthropological writings, as suggested by Allen Wood, Philip Rossi and Sharen Anderson-Gold. These efforts have successfully shown that the doctrine of radical evil is supported by Kant's notion of "unsocial sociability" (i.e., the antagonistic tendencies of the individual within his/her social world). To follow this discussion further, see Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 286-291; Philip Rossi, *The Social Authority of Reason: Kant's Critique, Radical Evil, and the Destiny of Humankind*, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2005, pp. 77-79; Sharon ANDERSON-GOLD, "God and Community: An Inquiry into the Religious Implications of the Highest Good," in Philip Rossi, and Michael J. WREEN (eds.), *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1991 (referenced by Allen Wood in *Kant's Ethical Thought*, p. 287, n. 8).

10. Hannah ARENDT, *Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, New York NY, Grove Press, 1978, p. 251.

11. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Useless Suffering." *Entre Nous. Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. SMITH and Barbara HARSHAV, New York NY, Continuum, 2006.

constitute the most decisive theoretical grounds for Arendt's and Levinas' rethinking of evil. Both philosophers follow Kant in locating evil beyond theodicy. However, unlike Kant, they emphasize its political, existential and "useless" nature. According to Levinas, the philosophy of Hitlerism is the political foundation of an evil that is "useless." Similarly, for Arendt, the totalitarian nature of Nazi rule has no utilitarian purpose for the suffering that it causes. For both thinkers, then, what characterizes the nature of Nazi evil is its non-pragmatic essence, and this is the sense in which Levinas calls evil "excessive" and Arendt calls it "unprecedented."

Kant's doctrine of radical evil and evil's inscrutability

Kant scholarship is replete with endless debates as to what Kant means by radical evil, i.e., "the propensity towards evil in human nature." My interpretation does not focus on these debates. Rather, my aim is to highlight two points that are central to my argument: Kant's notion of radical evil situates evil beyond theodicy and it grounds the source of evil in a maxim (i.e., in human freedom). The substance of his claim that evil is an inscrutable phenomenon is contained in the move beyond theodicy and Kant's identification of the source of evil in a maxim.

Kant's notion of radical evil has puzzled many of his critics since it first appeared on the pages of *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1792. His contemporaries interpreted Kant's account as a reconfiguration of the doctrine of original sin. According to this view, Kant compromised his critical philosophy in order to maintain a source of evil within human nature. However, a close look at *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* reveals that Kant's notion of radical evil is not a return to the doctrine of original sin. In fact, it is a direct challenge to the doctrine of original sin, insofar as he wishes to think evil within the boundaries of reason. With the notion of radical evil, Kant attempts to think evil beyond "the problem of evil," challenging the accounts of theodicy. In the *Religion*, to oppose the idea that original sin is the source of moral evil, Kant proposes situating the origin of moral evil neither in time nor in an event, but rather in relation to reason.¹² What this means is that moral evil will be considered as an effect, the cause of which will depend on the laws of freedom. Kant considers freedom of choice to be the ultimate cause that makes possible the existence of both good and evil. According to Kant, the predicates "good" and "evil" are not ascribed to people on the basis of experience, but rather on the basis of maxims – those subjective principles upon which one determines

12. Immanuel KANT, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood, George di GIOVANNI, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 6:42-43. Hereafter cited as *Religion*.

one's freedom of choice (*Willkür*). Hence, what makes someone evil is not the performance of evil actions, but rather her maxims.

Kant coins the term "radical evil" to refer to a propensity towards evil. To be more exact, it is the adjective "radical" that signifies this common propensity in human nature. Hence, the adjective "radical" does not refer to evil's magnitude, to its intensity, or to its extremity. Rather, as Henry Allison suggests, it refers to "the root or ground of the very possibility of all moral evil."¹³ In other words, all evils committed by humans are enabled by this propensity. Evil is radical only in the sense of its commonality; that all humans have an inherent propensity towards it. Furthermore, what makes someone evil is not the performance of evil actions, as I have stated above. Kant writes, "the judgment that an agent is an evil human being cannot reliably be based on experience."¹⁴ And he continues, "we call a human being evil, however, not because he performs actions that are evil (contrary to law), but because these are so constituted that they allow the inference of evil maxims in him."¹⁵

According to Kant, then, a person is evil because she adopts evil maxims. Evil maxims are those maxims that incorporate subjective incentives rather than the objective incentive of the moral law. As Gordon E. Michalson argues, "the distilled product of moral evil resides in the form of a maxim, the evil itself is a property of the act of the will that freely subordinates one incentive to another, the moral to the sensuous."¹⁶ The crucial point here is that the adoption of the evil maxim is not grounded in experience. Kant writes in the *Religion*:

In order, then, to call a human being evil, it must be possible to infer *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions [...] an underlying evil maxim, and, from this, the presence in the subject of a common ground, itself a maxim, of all particular morally evil maxims.¹⁷

This common ground is what Kant identifies as "the propensity to evil in human nature." This ground is inferred from the adoption of evil maxims and is itself a maxim. This inference of an evil maxim underlying other evil maxims shows, according to Kant, the human propensity towards evil. As a result, Kant stresses that we have a propensity to adopt maxims that are immoral. Here, with the concept of "propensity," Kant wishes to underline that although this inclination towards choosing immoral maxims is natural (or innate), it

13. Henry ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, New York NY, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 147.

14. Immanuel KANT, *Religion*, 6:20.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Gordon E. MICHALSON, "The Inscrutability of Moral Evil in Kant," *The Thomist*, 51 (1987), pp. 246-269 (p. 250).

17. Immanuel KANT, *Religion*, 6:20.

can be understood as “brought by the human being upon himself.”¹⁸ How can there be a natural propensity to evil in humans and at the same time free choice to commit evil? As many have suggested, this perplexity lies at the heart of the Kantian notion of radical evil, and is inherently connected to Kant’s understanding of human freedom.

On this point, Kantian scholarship has offered diverging interpretations. Critics such as Bernstein and Michalson suggest that Kant does not offer an explanation as to *why* evil exists, which ultimately renders evil an inscrutable phenomenon.¹⁹ On a different note, Allen Wood suggests that Kant’s doctrine of radical evil should be read as part of his Anthropology. In his suggestion, Wood is accompanied by scholars Philip Rossi²⁰ and Sharon Anderson-Gold, who consider the notion of radical evil to be linked to the idea of the progress of humanity.²¹

In his doctrine, Kant identifies three types of radical evil.²² The upshot of Kant’s argument about the three types of evil is that his doctrine of radical evil contains no idea of a diabolical will (wanting evil for its own sake).²³ Kant writes,

18. Having a “propensity” to evil means according to Kant the following: “It is distinguished from a disposition in that a propensity can indeed be innate yet *may* be represented as not being as such: it can rather be thought of [...] (if evil) as *brought* by the human being *upon* himself.” (*Religion*, 6:29)

19. My reading of Kant’s radical evil is very much in line with that of Michalson and Bernstein, who ultimately argue that it is the attempt to ground evil in the free choice of the will (i.e., freely choosing an evil maxim) that makes evil inscrutable according to Kant. For their discussion, see Gordon E. MICHALSON, “The Inscrutability of Moral Evil in Kant” and Richard BERNSTEIN, “Radical Evil: Kant at War with Himself,” in *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, pp. 11–45.

20. Philip Rossi (*The Social Authority of Reason: Kant’s Critique, Radical Evil, and the Destiny of Humankind*, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2005, p. 79) reads Kant’s doctrine of radical evil together with “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” where Kant discusses antagonism (“unsociable sociability”) as a necessary element for the progress of humanity. Rossi writes that “unsociable sociability is an integral element in the completion of his account of radical evil in human life. It functions as the condition for actualizing the human propensity to evil.”

21. Allen WOOD, *Kant’s Ethical Thought*, p. 288.

22. The first type is referred to as “frailty” and it is the condition in which the subjective incentive is stronger than the objective one, even though the objective incentive is rationally understood to be desirable. This is a case in which the subjective incentive overpowers the objective incentive, yet the author of the act is aware of this weakness. The second type of evil is called “impurity.” This is when the objective incentive is not adopted for its own sake, but is supported based on a subjective incentive – for example, when we help someone in order to feel good about ourselves. The third type of evil is called “corruption or perversity.” This happens when the ordering of the incentives is reversed – namely, when the moral incentive is not given priority in determining the character of the maxims. For Kant’s discussion, see *Religion* 6:29–31.

23. Wood generally agrees with Allison and others on this point. However, he also suggests that there is a situation that is close to “doing evil for evil’s sake.” In the case of the third type of radical evil (namely, corruption), if “someone chooses to disobey the moral law simply because they know that obeying it is what they ought to do,” this, according to Wood, could be considered an instance of doing evil for its own sake (Allen Wood, “Kant and the Intelligibility of

Whenever we therefore say, "The human being is by nature good," or, "He is by nature evil," this only means that he holds within himself a first ground (*to us inscrutable*) [emphasis added] for the adoption of good or evil (unlawful) maxims [...].²⁴

In a footnote to this passage, Kant further explains what he means by the terms "ground" and "inscrutable." Ground, in this context, is a maxim; it is the first adopted evil maxim, and in being so, it expresses the *propensity to evil in human nature*. Kant calls this first evil maxim the ground because it implies the possibility of adopting other evil maxims. That is to say, it is not a ground because it generates a maxim. Rather, it is a ground whose very existence informs us that the adoption of further evil maxims is possible:

That the first subjective ground of the adoption of moral maxims is *inscrutable* [emphasis added] can be seen provisionally from this: Since the adoption is free, its ground (i.e., why I have adopted an evil maxim and not a good one instead) must not be sought in any incentive of nature, but always again in a maxim [...] without ever being able to come to the first ground.²⁵

As this passage suggests, the adoption of the first evil maxim is inscrutable because it is the result of an act of freedom. Furthermore, this ground is a freely adopted maxim, and therefore cannot be explained with respect to any incentive of nature. Hence, the first evil maxim is *presupposed* rather than explained. The consequence of Kant's argument is that evil is inscrutable because evil is grounded in freedom of choice.²⁶ The implication of this for his morality is that the moral law has to be articulated as a categorical imperative precisely because humans have this natural propensity to evil.

In the following section, I turn to Arendt's reflections on evil with a focus on her two notions of evil (i.e., radical evil and banality of evil). As will become clear, Arendt's notion of radical evil is a direct response to Kant's. Arendt is critical of Kant for not articulating an adequate account of evil to capture politically motivated evildoing. Taking this task upon herself, Arendt's theoretical move will be to coin the term "banality of evil." By way of this term, Arendt moves the category of evil away from morality to situate it within the realm of politics. With this move, I argue, her remarks about evil formulate a distinct and peculiar new ontology of evil. This new ontology departs from that of Kant's in that rather than viewing evil as a positive phenomenon like

Evil," in Sharon ANDERSON-GOLD and Pablo MUCHNIK (eds.), *Kant's Anatomy of Evil*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 155.

24. Immanuel KANT, *Religion*, 6:21.

25. Immanuel KANT, *Religion*, 6:21 ft.

26. For an in-depth analysis of the inscrutability of evil in Kant, see Allen W. Wood, "Kant and the Intelligibility of Evil"; Gordon E. MICHALSON, "The Inscrutability of Moral Evil in Kant"; Richard BERNSTEIN, "Radical Evil: Kant at War with Himself."

the Kantian “propensity to evil,” Arendt defines evil as a suffering from lack of being and depth.

The ontology of Arendt’s conception of evil

We have seen that Kant’s concept of evil locates it in a maxim, and in doing so, approaches evil as a moral phenomenon. I now turn to Arendt’s conception of evil, which politicizes it and understands it not as a positive propensity, but rather as an ontological lack. According to Richard Bernstein, “Arendt (like Levinas) believes that the evil burst forth in the Nazi period indicates a *rupture* [emphasis added] with tradition, and reveals the inadequacy of traditional accounts of morals and ethics to deal with evil.”²⁷ Traditional theories of evil cannot effectively account for the evil committed during the Holocaust because they regard evil either as a theological or a moral issue. Bernstein, following Arendt, contends that old accounts of evil cannot be deployed to make sense of this new form of evil. My argument concerns how Arendt articulates this new form of evil through her concept of banality of evil. This notion, I argue, presents a new ontology of evil. I begin my reflections by discussing the link between Arendt’s notions of radical evil and banality of evil.

It has been widely noted that Hannah Arendt is the first Continental philosopher to explicitly raise the question of evil to a strictly political level. With Arendt’s forceful remarks in the *The Origins of Totalitarianism*²⁸ and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the question of evil rapidly becomes, for her, one of social criticism and political philosophy. Yet there is still a controversy in Arendt scholarship as to the relation between her earlier conception of “radical evil” in *The Origins* (1951) and her later formulation of the “banality of evil” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963).²⁹ Henry Allison’s 1996 essay discusses Arendt’s usage of these two terms (radical evil and banality of evil) and offers a comparative reading with Kant’s radical evil.³⁰ Allison argues that Arendt’s notions of banality of evil and radical evil are very different, even contrastable. To

27. Richard BERNSTEIN, “Levinas: Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy,” in *Radical Evil*, p. 168.

28. Hereafter cited as *Origins*.

29. The controversy regarding Arendt’s notions of “radical evil” and “banality of evil” has been underscored by the following scholars: Peg BIRMINGHAM, “Holes of Oblivion: The Banality of Radical Evil,” *Hypatia*, 18 (2003), p. 81; Berel LANG, “Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil,” in Lewis P. HINCHMAN and Sandra K. HINCHMAN (eds.), *Hannah Arendt Critical Essays*, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 1994, p. 44; Adi OPHIR, “Between Eichmann and Kant: Thinking on Evil after Arendt” *History and Memory*, 8 (1996), p. 89; Seyla BENHABIB, “Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, in Dana VILLA (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 74; Henry E. ALLISON, “Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis,” in Maria Pia LARA (ed.), *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives*, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 2001.

30. Henry E. ALLISON, “Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis.”

develop his argument, Allison's essay begins with a quote by Arendt from her letter to Gershom Scholem in July 24, 1963:

It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that *it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension* [emphasis added]. It can over-grow and lay waste the whole world precisely because *it spreads like a fungus on the surface* [emphasis added]. It is "*thought-defying*," [emphasis added] as I said because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because *there is nothing* [emphasis added]. That is its "banality." Only the good has depth and can be radical.³¹

According to Allison, "Arendt is here [in the above passage] contrasting her post-Eichmann view of evil with that of her earlier work, *The Origins*."³² In contrast to Allison, I argue that there is a continuity between these two formulations of evil, and that, furthermore, the inscrutable nature of evil is manifested in Arendt's reflections on the banality of evil. I first examine her notions of radical evil and banality of evil, and then return to the above passage to stress my earlier point about Arendt's new ontology of evil. I conclude that it is within this new ontology of evil that evil gains an inscrutable character for Arendt.

In *Origins*, Arendt systematically traces the socio-historical emergence of the conditions of Nazi horror and its political implications. Towards the end, under the section entitled "Total Domination," Arendt criticizes the Western philosophical tradition, Kant included, for failing to provide an adequate understanding of "radical evil":

It is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a 'radical evil,' and this is true for both Christian theology [...], as well as for Kant, the only philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least must have suspected the existence of *this evil* [emphasis added] even though he immediately rationalized it in the concept of a "perverted ill will" that could be explained by comprehensible motives. Therefore, we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know. There is only one thing that seems to be discernible: we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous.³³

Here, by "radical evil," Arendt means evil that is political in nature and is "unprecedented," exemplified by systematic mass killings and new techniques of killing that are developed and organized by a nation-state. It is *this phenomenon* that has been unknown before. With the term "radical evil," we are

31. Hannah ARENDT, *Jew as Pariah*, pp. 250-251.

32. Henry E. ALLISON, "Reflections on the Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis," p. 86.

33. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 459.

not in the realm of moral evil, but rather that of political evil. Yet only the former has been the concern of the Western philosophical tradition, as she concludes above. For such evil to be committed on a “gigantic scale,” it must be state-administered, but there is no previous account of evil that addresses the state as the originator of evil. Hence, Arendt is criticizing the tradition for its lack of political accounts of evil.³⁴

With regard to the passage above, Allison suggests that Arendt misunderstands Kant’s notion of radical evil. He implies that she is not justified in her criticism of Kant because she misinterprets Kant’s radical evil as referring to a “deeply rooted demonic evil.”³⁵ Yet nowhere in her corpus has Arendt ever suggested that Nazi evil had a “demonic” nature. Quite to the contrary, she insisted that it “could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology.”³⁶ It appears that Allison’s above misreading of Arendt issues from his commitment to distinguishing what he identifies as “Arendt’s earlier and post-Eichmann views of evil,” as if these two are entirely different conceptions of evil. This becomes clear with Allison’s further suggestion that, despite Arendt’s misreading of Kant’s notion of radical evil, Kant’s notion of radical evil is similar to Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil, because both Kant and Arendt *reject* the idea that evildoing is related to the possession of a demonic nature.³⁷ Allison assumes that Arendt entirely changed her views about evil when she attended the trial of Adolf Eichmann. In distinction to Allison, I think that with the term “banality of evil,” Arendt emphasizes the conditions

34. We could pause here and ask whether the Holocaust was “unprecedented,” as Arendt claims. And if it was unprecedented, can Arendt blame Kant for not providing an adequate account? Or rather, was the Holocaust an intensified version of old forms of evil-doing, but now taking place at the heart of Europe, effectively put into practice with the scientific racism of the day, which had been previously developed to maintain and support the ideological basis of the Transatlantic slave trade and other colonialist endeavours? There is common agreement that the discourses and practices of anti-Semitism, which were at the core of the genocidal act, were already part of the governing ideologies of Europe, centuries before the Nazis came to power. In addition, German rulers had already practiced the extermination of the Herero people in South West Africa at the beginning of the 20th century. Furthermore, as Eric Weitz notes, “German military and civilian officials supported the Young Turk government and, thereby, became complicit in the Armenian Genocide.” Cf. Eric D. WEITZ, “Germany and the Young Turks,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, in Ronald Grigor SUNY, Fatma Müge GÖÇEK, Norman M. NAIMARK (eds.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 196–197. I think all of the above suggest a continuity and not a rupture in politically and ideologically motivated evildoing. Perhaps the continuity is highlighted most significantly by Hitler’s famous remark, “who still talks nowadays about the extermination of the Armenians?”

35. Henry ALLISON, “Reflections on The Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis,” p. 87.

36. Hannah ARENDT, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, New York NY, Schocken Books, 2003, p. 159. Originally published in 1971.

37. Henry ALLISON, “Reflections on The Banality of (Radical) Evil: A Kantian Analysis,” p. 87.

of emergence (at the individual level) of the radical evil she identifies as Nazi totalitarianism. And I contend that Arendt's point with regard to Kant is accurate insofar as she wants to underscore the trajectory of thought within which Kant's ideas about evil operate. Kant does not consider the concept of evil to have any political implications, at least within the scope of his doctrine of radical evil.

According to Arendt in the *Origins*, Nazi evil is radical in the sense of its "unprecedented" nature. It was unknown to us in two senses. First, this evil involved total domination, and was enabled by the technology of the concentration camps, the gas chambers and all the methods used to render man "superfluous." According to Arendt, there were three steps to rendering man superfluous, which required total domination. In the attempt to achieve total domination, the Nazi government first attacked "the juridical person." This meant that the rapid criminalization of Jews and other victims was followed by deprivation of rights. The second step was to kill "the moral person," referring to the fact that Nazis specifically aimed at corrupting solidarity among the inmates.³⁸ The third step was to kill "the individuality of the person." On this point, Arendt writes, "once the moral person has been killed, the one thing that still prevents men from being made into living corpses is the differentiation of the individual, his unique identity."³⁹ Stripping individuals of their spontaneity was possible only by means of total domination, and the Nazis' supreme political principle aimed at precisely that. Total domination was the inevitable result of Nazi rule and was only possible by making all complicit in the crime:

Through the creation of conditions under which conscience ceases to be adequate and to do good becomes utterly impossible, the consciously organized complicity of all men in the crimes of totalitarian regimes is extended to the victims and thus made really total.⁴⁰

The second sense in which the evil of the Nazi regime was unprecedented was in its "non-appearance" as evil. At the time of these "crimes against humanity," the German people were not able to identify "the evil" that was taking place. This was again, according to Arendt, the effect of total domination, the end result of which was the creation of a social world where people never realized what they were doing.⁴¹ I think this is the point at which Arendt's notions of radical evil and banality of evil merge.

38. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 452.

39. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 453.

40. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 452.

41. Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York NY, Penguin Books, 2006, p. 288.

It is the appearance of some *radical evil*, previously unknown to us [emphasis added], [...] the realization that something seems to be involved in modern politics that actually should never be involved in politics [...], namely, all or *nothing* [emphasis added].⁴²

It was this “nothing” at which the Nazis aimed, according to Arendt. And again it was this “nothing” that prevented the evil of the Nazi regime from appearing to the German public as “evil.” This point about “nothing” brings us to the discussion of Arendt’s new ontology of evil. Arendt stresses the ontologically negative nature of evil in her later writings. In 1963, in the book based on her report on Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, Arendt for the first time suggests the term “banality of evil.”⁴³ Here, she clearly indicates that banality of evil refers to a phenomenon:

When I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. [...] It was sheer *thoughtlessness* [emphasis added] – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.⁴⁴

The phenomenon which she uncovers is Adolf Eichmann, who is a paradigmatic example of a person who cannot distinguish right from wrong.⁴⁵ Arendt contends that “he [Eichmann] had no motives at all”; in fact, he “never realized what he was doing.”⁴⁶ This testifies to his “sheer thoughtlessness”⁴⁷. Faced with Eichmann’s disposition during his trial, Arendt sees a “quite authentic inability to think,” proposing that the nature of Eichmann’s evildoing was “banal.”⁴⁸

In *Origins*, Arendt had identified the total domination of Nazi rule as “radical” evil. Attending Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, she observed that such a domination produced subjects whose evil was “banal,” i.e., “without depth.” Arendt highlights this point in her 1971 essay, “Thinking and Moral Considerations”:

42. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 443.

43. However, long before Arendt formulated her notion of the banality of evil in the 1963 publication, it had first been suggested by Karl Jaspers in his October 19, 1946 letter to Arendt. In the letter, Jaspers writes: “It seems to me that we have to see these things in their total *banality* [emphasis added], in their prosaic triviality, because that’s what truly characterizes them. Bacteria can cause epidemics that wipe out nations, but they remain merely bacteria.” *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, ed. Lotte KOHLER and Jans SANER, trans. Robert and Rita KIMBER, New York NY, Harcourt Brace, 1992, p. 62.

44. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 287.

45. Seyla Benhabib suggests that “Eichmann becomes for her a paradigm case”: “Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,” in Dana VILLA (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 68.

46. Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 287.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Hannah ARENDT, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” p. 159.

Some years ago, reporting the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, I spoke of “the banality of evil” and meant with this no theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps *extraordinary shallowness* [emphasis added].⁴⁹

As we can see above, with the notion of banality of evil, Arendt wants to stress that this evil “committed on a gigantic scale” cannot be traced back to the intentions of the individual. It is this point that she communicates when she writes, “[h]owever monstrous the deeds were, the doer [Eichmann] was neither monstrous nor demonic.”⁵⁰ On this point, Berel Lang rightly claims that Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil captures a “new kind of evil-doer.”⁵¹ This new kind of evil-doer is the production of a new form of political life, namely, totalitarianism. The implication of Lang’s interpretation is that we need to think of forms of evil as productions of certain ideologies and of politics.⁵² In other words, “banality of evil” is a phrase for understanding how one could take part in the production of evil on a gigantic scale by participating in a social rule that is robustly totalitarian.

Now, let’s turn back to the first quote that I referred to at the very beginning of my discussion of Arendt:

[E]vil [...] possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension [emphasis added]. It can over-grow and lay waste the whole world precisely because *it spreads like a fungus* [emphasis added]. It is “thought-defying,” [emphasis added] as I said because [...] the moment it [thought] concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because *there is nothing* [emphasis added]. That is its “banality.”⁵³

In this passage, Arendt explicitly concludes that evil is inscrutable. This new evil is inscrutable because it cannot be traced back to a cause within the subject, nor does it have a being of its own. It presents *a fungus-like behavior*, which feeds off of and destroys the living organism to which it is attached. Nazi evil “spread[s] like a fungus,” this is why it is “extreme” yet without any depth, and whenever thought tries to engage with this evil there is “nothing” to grasp. In this depiction of evil, wherein “banality” refers to a “lack of depth,” we can clearly detect *a peculiar and new ontology of evil*. Arendt’s reading of Eichmann underscores this *fungus-like behavior*, a man “whose only personal

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. Berel LANG, “Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Evil,” p. 49 (emphasis not mine).

52. According to this logic, then, the phenomenon of Islamist terrorism should force us to devise another kind of concept or notion (that is to say, an intellectual toolkit) that can capture the kind of evil these horrific acts present.

53. Hannah ARENDT, *Jew as Pariah*, pp. 250-251.

distinction was perhaps *extraordinary shallowness*.⁵⁴ It is this lack of depth that turned him into one of the worst war criminals of the 20th century.

Charles Mathewes suggests that Arendt's analysis of Eichmann brings her close to the Augustinian conception of evil as privation.⁵⁵ I agree that Arendt's emphasis on the negative character of evil is Augustinian.⁵⁶ It is precisely this negative ontology of evil, articulated through the concept of banality of evil, that underlies the difference between Arendt's and Kant's formulations. As we have seen above, Kant does not understand evil negatively, but rather positively – through the affirmation of a propensity to evil in human nature.

My discussion of Arendt's criticism of Kantian radical evil was partially oriented by a polemical engagement with Allison's essay. This polemic allowed me to clarify the distinction between Arendt's and Kant's notions of radical evil. And moreover, it facilitated my argument concerning the banality of evil, as a more in-depth analysis of the operation of radical evil at the level of the individual.

In the beginning of this section, I mentioned Bernstein's claim that the Holocaust constitutes a rupture in the thinking of evil for both Levinas and Arendt. I demonstrated that this rupture, for Arendt, is the result of a "new kind of evil-doer" and implies a new ontology of evil. Levinas addresses the same phenomenon (Nazi evil) with a different terminology and methodology. His phenomenological and existential analysis of the suffering body marks both his engagement with the question of evil and his difference from Arendt.

The experience of evil: Levinas' existential and phenomenological approach

We have seen from our previous discussion that Kant wishes to think the question of evil non-theologically. With a similar gesture, Levinas insists on locating the question beyond the paradigm of theodicy. In this section, I argue that Levinas follows Kant in formulating an understanding of evil that is at once inscrutable and rejects theodicy. Yet unlike both Kant and Arendt, his

54. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," p. 159.

55. Charles Mathewes' study *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* focuses on Arendt, whose treatment of evil, he argues, falls within the Augustinian tradition. According to Mathewes, "Arendt's work on totalitarianism and 'the banality of evil' develops an Augustinian account of evil as privation [...]" (p. 7). Mathewes further argues that Arendt follows Augustine in claiming that "evil is nothing precisely because it is wholly negative, a self-annihilating vacuum [...]" (p. 151) Arendt's depiction of Eichmann is her way of suggesting that evil is merely a defect. According to Mathewes, "her claim that Eichmann's evil is banal implied simply that Eichmann's shallowness was as deep as evil could go" (p. 168): cf. Charles MATHEWES, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, New York NY, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

56. The scope of this article does not allow me to further elaborate the Augustinian roots of Arendt's notion of banality of evil. Though, I should note that my interpretation is very much influenced by Mathewes' above-mentioned study.

approach to evil is robustly phenomenological and existential. As we shall see, Levinas is concerned with the question of evil at the level of existence, and here, the notion of "suffering" is key. It addresses physical evil experienced at the level of the body.

Reading Paul Davies' article, "Sincerity and the end of theodicy"⁵⁷, one is assured that a comparative reading of Kant and Levinas is a favorable path for situating Levinas' ethical project. Davies clearly shows that Levinas' notion of "responsibility, always asymmetrically and sincerely *for the other* [emphasis in original], belongs to the analysis of an affectivity that contrasts sharply and deliberately with that of [Kantian] respect."⁵⁸ Kant and Levinas differ in their formulations of how one becomes an ethical self; for Kant it is an active and willful endeavor, whereas for Levinas, becoming responsible for the other is not determined by my decision. Levinas writes, "the responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision."⁵⁹ My analysis below will develop out of the assessment of Levinas' ethical project as a reflection upon and a response to Kant's moral philosophy.

I agree with Paul Davies' suggestion that Levinas offers a "polemical engagement with Kant," where the latter situates ethical responsibility in one's respect for the moral law, grounded in an autonomous being, who is fully *active* in her appropriation of the moral law; whereas for the former, it is *passivity* that signifies my relationship with the other. I suggest that we can nevertheless detect three fundamental themes that Levinas' ethical theorization shares with Kant's. These themes are as follows: 1) the rejection of theodicy; 2) the ethics of transcendence; and 3) the inscrutable character of evil.⁶⁰

Following from these common themes, Levinas and Kant formulate an understanding of evil that is, on the one hand, inscrutable, and, on the other, rejects theodicy. Leaving aside the diverging formation of ethical subjectivity in Kant and Levinas that Davies rightly identifies, it should be noted that both

57. Paul Davies, "Sincerity and the end of theodicy: three remarks on Levinas and Kant," in Simon CRITCHLEY and Robert BERNASCONI (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

58. Paul Davies, "Sincerity and the end of theodicy," p. 163. Peter Dews also offers a comparative analysis that underscores the similarities and differences of Levinas' and Kant's ethical projects ("Levinas: Ethics à l'Outrance," in *The Idea of Evil*, pp. 160-179). In particular, the issue of transcendence, namely, the requirement that my relationship to the other must transcend all determinations of the social sphere, is at the core of both theories of ethics.

59. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 1998, p. 10.

60. For the purposes of my argument, I focus only on the first and the third points. The second point would require me to offer an analysis of Kant's ethical theory beginning from his earlier writings. The necessity of the categorical imperative for Kant's morality, which gives it its transcendent character, is explicitly articulated in the *Groundwork*. Similarly, the central role of transcendence in Levinasian ethics is articulated in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, the discussion of which would exceed the scope of this paper.

philosophers project these two characteristics (i.e., the inscrutability of evil and the rejection of theodicy) in the service of their radical ethics.

In the scholarship there is agreement that Levinas' philosophical oeuvre can be read as a response to evil.⁶¹ I consider the following four texts as essential for understanding Levinas' approach to the question of evil: "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism"⁶² (1934); *Existence and Existents*⁶³ (1947); "Transcendence and Evil" (1978); and "Useless Suffering," (1982).⁶⁴ Within these texts, three notions orient Levinas' discussion of evil: "elemental Evil," the "horror of being," and "useless suffering." I begin my exposition with "elemental Evil" and offer a reading that connects it with the other two terms.

"Elemental Evil" is the definitive term in Levinas' 1934 essay "Reflections." In fact, he states that the purpose of the essay is to express "elemental Evil," which he identifies with the horror of National Socialism. Here, the term "elemental" refers to the "elementary feelings" of blood and flesh. Hitlerism claims a re-appropriation of the realm of the body.⁶⁵ In the opposite direction, we find Western liberalism and Christian universalism residing within the same trajectory, one in which "man is absolutely free in his relations with the world"⁶⁶, as opposed to the philosophy of Hitlerism in which man is "chained to his body, [...] refusing the power to escape from himself."⁶⁷ Hence, Hitlerism pits communal "fate" against the "freedom" of spirit. According to Levinas, in calling for "rootedness" in facticity, Hitlerism denies "freedom," "infinity" and "transcendence," and this is the point that brings together the philosophies of Heidegger and Hitlerism. For Levinas, Heideggerian ontology is an "ontology of a being concerned with being."⁶⁸ As we shall see shortly, in contrast to Heidegger, Levinas wishes to articulate "the Being independent of beings," through his notion of "there is" ("il y a").

61. Richard BERNSTEIN, "Levinas: Evil and The Temptation of Theodicy," p. 167; Simona FORTI, *New Demons Rethinking Power and Evil Today*, trans. Zakiya HANAFI, Standford CA, Standford University Press, 2014, p. 109. Howard Caygill suggests that the "revenge of evil" is central to the project of *Totality and Infinity*: cf. Howard CAYGILL, *Levinas and the Political*, New York NY, Routledge, 2002, p. 98.

62. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1990), pp. 63-71, hereafter cited as "Reflections." The publication years in brackets refer to the originals French texts.

63. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 2001.

64. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Transcendence and Evil," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 1998, pp. 175-186.

65. Simon Critchley stresses that for Levinas, "National Socialism is a philosophy of the elemental": cf. "Levinas and Hitlerism," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 35 (2014), p. 227.

66. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Reflections," p. 64.

67. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Reflections," p. 70.

68. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Reflections," p. 63. Robert Bernasconi clarifies what is at stake for Levinas in Heidegger's ontology. He writes, "whereas Heidegger had insisted that Being is always the Being of a being, Levinas sought access to Being independent of beings." (Foreword to Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. xi)

In "Reflections," Levinas writes, "man's essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage."⁶⁹ The racism of Hitlerism is constructed against the liberal ideal of the free spirit not bound by history and that which transcends the body. Levinas contends that "the importance attributed to this feeling for the body, with which the Western spirit has never wished to content itself, is at the basis of a new conception of man."⁷⁰ This new conception of man promised by Hitlerism projects itself through the communal bond of racial solidarity.

It is my contention that one can read Levinas' *Existence and Existents* as a phenomenological analysis of the "elemental Evil" that Levinas identified in the "Reflections." The central position of the body in Nazi ideology, in which the body understood as race is at the root of racial solidarity, gives way to racial purification, which then necessitates, according to Hitlerism, the elimination of the other's body. Hence, Nazi ideology targets the body of the Other. This is why, in each of his writings about evil, Levinas emphasizes that the experience of evil is an embodied experience. This is also the very point of *Existence and Existents*.

Levinas is very explicit about his criticism of Heideggerian ontology in the introduction to *Existence and Existents*, where he stresses that his aim is to challenge Heidegger for not recognizing the tragic aspect of existence, what Levinas here calls an "underlying evil in its very positivity."⁷¹ Levinas' essay "Transcendence and Evil" makes a similar point, once again criticizing Heidegger.⁷² Hence, these two texts also deal with the question of evil through an engagement with and criticism of Heideggerian ontology.

The concept that marks *Existence and Existents* is the "horror of being," or, as Levinas sometimes calls it, the "tragedy of existence." For Levinas, the tragedy of existence need not entail any diabolical element to be horrific; the tragedy of existence is testified to by the very struggle for life – in the Nazi camps. He writes, "already in what is called the struggle for life [...] there is the objective of existence itself, bare existence [...]."⁷³ I suffer when I am deprived of the needs required to satisfy my embodied life, when the mere fact of existence appears to be burdensome and horrific. In this text, Levinas mainly opposes the privileging of *Dasein*'s neutral relation to the world – the fact that the world is not described as having impediments, horrors and evils, but rather one in which *Dasein* finds itself "free to choose" in caring for it or being absorbed in *idle talk*. Hence, Levinas' reflections here are "governed by

69. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Reflections," p. 69.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 2001, p. 4.

72. Emmanuel LEVINAS, "Transcendence and Evil," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 1998, p. 178.

73. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence and Existents*, p. 10.

a profound need to leave the climate of that [Heideggerian] philosophy.”⁷⁴ Levinas sees in Heideggerian ontology no evil at the existential level.

Moreover, *Dasein*’s existence is personal; by contrast, for Levinas, existence is anonymous. It refers to the horizon at which I find my experience among others’ experiences. Contra Heidegger, for whom *Dasein* is “in each case mine,” for Levinas existence does not belong to the individual. Rather, Levinas describes a movement from the anonymity of “existence” (i.e., “the Being independent of beings,” in other words, *there is* or *il y a*) to an “existent.” He identifies this process as burdensome. The existence is not given, but is taken up by the existent, because it entails effort. While for Heidegger *Dasein*’s anxiety arises with respect to its own finitude, according to Levinas, existence itself is horrific and causes anxiety. Levinas writes, “*existence of itself* [emphasis added] harbors something tragic which is not only there because of its finitude.”⁷⁵ Existence is tragic because one lives with a body that can suffer.

Levinas re-articulates this point in “Transcendence and Evil,” where he states that “physical evil is the very depth of anxiety. [A]nxiety in its carnal severity, is the root of all social miseries, all human dereliction.”⁷⁶ In contrast to Heidegger, for whom “the essential in anxiety” is *being towards death*, Levinas agrees with Philip Nemo about the “conjunction of evil and anxiety” conditioned by a bodily existence.⁷⁷ Evil shows itself in the form of bodily harm, damage and suffering and not necessarily in death. The tragedy of existence comes to the fore when to be is to suffer as body. This suffering is “excessive” according to Levinas. It is this very relation between bodily suffering and evil’s excessive nature that orients Levinas’ formulation of evil as an inscrutable experience.

In “Transcendence and Evil,” Levinas stresses evil’s inscrutability due to its excessive nature:

In its malignancy as evil, evil is an excess. While the notion of excess evokes first the quantitative idea of intensity, of a degree surpassing measure, evil is an excess in its very quiddity. This notation is very important: evil is not an excess because suffering can be terrible, and go beyond the endurable. The break with the normal and the normative, with order, with synthesis, with the world already constitutes its qualitative essence. Suffering qua suffering is but a concrete and quasi-sensible manifestation of the non-integratable, the non-justifiable.⁷⁸

74. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence and Existents*, p. 4.

75. Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Existence and Existents*, p. 5.

76. Emmanuel LEVINAS, “Transcendence and Evil,” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS, Pittsburgh PA, Duquesne University Press, 1998, p. 179.

77. 77. *Ibid.*

78. Emmanuel LEVINAS, “Transcendence and Evil,” p. 180. With respect to this passage, Bernstein underscores that it is this excessive nature of evil that makes it incomprehensible according to Levinas. My analysis agrees with Bernstein’s on this point. However, he reads this incomprehensibility in connection with Kant’s idea of the sublime and does not link it to the

As he suggests above, evil is excessive, but this does not refer to a quantitative measure. Evil is excessive not because there is *too much* bodily suffering. Here, the term excess designates “non-integrability” and “non-justifiability.” This is the sense in which Levinas construes evil as an excess, and thereby, as an incomprehensible experience.

I would like to stress further evil’s inscrutability in Levinas by focusing on the essay “Useless Suffering.” This is Levinas’ final text specifically on the question of evil. The text involves, on the one hand, a phenomenological analysis of suffering, and on the other, a critique of theodicy. With the term “useless evil,” Levinas’ intention is to offer a thinking of evil beyond theodicy, because according to Levinas, theodicy tames evil and makes it “integrable.” He states: “Beliefs presupposed by Theodicy! That is the grand idea necessary to the inner peace of souls in our distressed world. It is called upon to make sufferings here below comprehensible.”⁷⁹ According to Simona Forti, with the term “theodicy,” Levinas explicitly refers to “the temptation to make the suffering of the innocent bearable by giving a meaning.”⁸⁰ Against theodicy, Levinas coins the term “useless evil.” Evil is “useless” in the sense that it is not a part of a greater whole. It is “the non-integratable” and “the non-justifiable,” as the above quote from “Transcendence and Evil” suggests. Evil has no specific purpose; it is not accountable. Evil is found at the level of existence, which is always already bodily. It is the experience of the suffering body that turns one’s existence into an “anonymous existence.” When one suffers in the Nazi camps, one suffers not as an individual, as Arendt also states, but as a species, as a “living corpse.” Hence, one suffers anonymously. Anonymity of suffering is anonymity of bodily presence.

Levinas’ prior phenomenological analysis of suffering in *Existence and Existents* is key to understanding his analysis of “useless evil.”⁸¹ This analysis shows why he rejects the taming of evil by theodicy, since integration – the very aim of theodicy – does further injustice to the dead who are awaiting justice.⁸² Hence, for Levinas, “useless evil” means “useless suffering,” a suffering that cannot be integrated. In “Useless Suffering,” the excess of suffering is described with the following words:

inscrutable nature of radical evil: cf. Richard J. BERNSTEIN, “Levinas: Evil and The Temptation of Theodicy,” p. 175.

79. Emmanuel LEVINAS, “Useless Suffering,” in *Entre Nous*, trans. Michael B. SMITH and Barbara HARSHAV, New York NY, Continuum, 2006, p. 82.

80. Simona FORTI, *New Demons*, p. 110.

81. Here “useless” is used in the sense of not being oriented towards a purpose.

82. Howard Caygill expresses this point as follows: “The horror of *il y a* is intricately bound to haunting, to the dead who cannot be forgotten – *il y a* is the continual ‘presence’ of the murdered awaiting justice. The pressure of this responsibility lends urgency and rigour to the refusal of any ontology that would privilege the projects and the acts of the living.” (“Levinas and the Political,” p. 52)

an excess, an unwelcome superfluity, that is inscribed in a sensorial content, penetrating, as suffering, the dimensions of meaning that seem to open themselves to it, or become grafted onto it. [...] It is as if suffering were not just a datum, [...] but the way in which the refusal, opposing the assemblage of data into a meaningful whole, rejects it; at once what disturbs order and this disturbance itself.⁸³

As the above passage suggests, suffering, although it presents itself as a “sensorial content,” is a content that cannot be read just as a “datum.” A datum makes sense; it is part of a larger whole. A datum gives meaning. In contrast, suffering is described as an intentionality, as a “way” of relating, which gains its meaning in refusal. Suffering refuses integration; it is both refusing something else and the act of refusing. Levinas defines suffering as an “excess.” Later in the text, he also indicates that it is a “modality,” a “passivity.”⁸⁴ The passivity of suffering is what makes suffering evil.⁸⁵ In bodily suffering there is no “I” that can escape it. Suffering captures me as an anonymous being, because it reduces me to pure body, and this happens for no purpose, “for nothing” (this is its uselessness). Suffering is the passive experience of the “horror of being,” when the body that is the cause of suffering chains me to an anonymous existence.

Levinas’ phenomenological analysis of the “horror of being” and his concept of “useless suffering” attest to an ontology of evil where evil is not a lack of being, but rather an excess of being. This is what makes it beyond comprehension. Similarly, with Kant’s notion of radical evil, evil is not a lack of being, but is positive in the sense that it refers to a propensity of human nature, and it is this propensity that makes it unaccountable. For both thinkers, then, evil has a positive ontological status and is inscrutable. Their point of divergence is that Levinas discusses evil’s inscrutability within the context of the Holocaust. He focuses on the experience of evil from an existential and phenomenological point of view, whereas Kant speaks of evil as a moral issue. Nonetheless, both thinkers understood the phenomenon of evil as possessing a positive ontological status, which led them to formulate their ethical theories in such a radical fashion.

Conclusion

As I have shown above, each thinker means something quite different by inscrutability, while at the same time all agree that the phenomenon of evil is unaccountable and inscrutable. For Levinas, the excessive character of evil results from its “useless” nature; it is experienced as a non-integratable ele-

83. Emmanuel LEVINAS, “Useless Suffering, p. 78.

84. Emmanuel LEVINAS, “Useless Suffering, p. 79.

85. *Ibid.*

ment. This point can also be found in *Origins* when Arendt refers to the pragmatic “uselessness” of the committed acts:

The incredibility of the horrors is closely bound up with their economic uselessness. The Nazis carried this uselessness to the point of open anti-utility when in the midst of war, despite the shortage of building material and rolling stock, they set up enormous, costly extermination factories and transported millions of people back and forth.⁸⁶

Arendt notes that it is precisely this “uselessness” that conditions total destruction and gives totalitarianism its essence.⁸⁷ It is important to note that by the term “uselessness,” these thinkers do not mean “serving no purpose.” Rather, they refer to a kind of evil that aims at total destruction and that cannot be rationalized away as a means to an end. The act of killing millions of people had no ulterior aim apart from their destruction; it was precisely their destruction that was the goal.

My discussion of Arendt and Levinas shows that their treatment of evil is nonetheless haunted by a trajectory of thinking that stresses the incomprehensible nature of evil. Although both thinkers orient our discussion of evil through an existential-political lens that transcends previous accounts of evil, the very vocabulary they use still expresses evil’s inscrutability. Hence, I have demonstrated the continuity between Kant, Levinas and Arendt by focusing on the notion of evil’s inscrutability, while at the same time underlining how Levinas and Arendt differ from Kant. For Levinas, evil is inscrutable because it refers to the excessive state of bodily suffering. As distinguished from this, Arendt’s explanation of evil’s inscrutability is linked to evil’s lack of being because there is no-thing to comprehend.

*Department of Philosophy
College of Social Sciences and Humanities
Koç University
Istanbul*

SUMMARY

Since 2001, Continental philosophical studies of evil suggest that we are forced to rethink the category of evil as we face acts of terrorism on a global scale. In light of this suggestion, this paper traces the idea of the “inscrutability of evil” as a common lens through which we associate the category of evil with the phenomena we identify as evil. This idea finds its first modern formulation in Kant’s theory of radical evil. In this article, I argue that Hannah Arendt and

86. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 445.

87. Hannah ARENDT, *Origins*, p. 456.

Emmanuel Levinas follows Kant in identifying evil as an inscrutable phenomenon. While they all agree that evil cannot be rationalized, integrated into reason, or understood within the framework of a theodicy, for Kant, evil is inscrutable because it is grounded in freedom; for Arendt, evil is inscrutable because it is “banal;” and for Levinas, evil is inscrutable because it is “excessive” and “useless.” My analysis demonstrates that inscrutability is an essential marker of the concept of evil, since it is found in all three accounts as a feature of evil, regardless of the fact that in each account a different type of evil is at stake (moral, political and existential).

SOMMAIRE

Depuis 2001, la réflexion philosophique continentale sur la question du mal met de l'avant l'idée que la confrontation à l'expérience répandue du terrorisme nous force à repenser la notion même du mal. Dans cette perspective, cet article scrute l'idée du caractère impénétrable du mal comme lentille commune à travers laquelle nous associons la notion du mal au phénomène que nous identifions comme tel. Cette idée a trouvé sa première formulation moderne chez Kant dans sa théorie du mal radical. Selon la perspective que je développe ici, Hannah Arendt et Emmanuel Levinas s'inscrivent dans la suite de Kant en identifiant le mal comme un phénomène impénétrable. S'ils s'entendent pour affirmer que le mal ne saurait être rationnalisé, soit en étant intégré du point de vue rationnel, soit en étant compris dans le cadre d'une théodicée, les trois rendent compte différemment de son caractère impénétrable: pour Kant, en tant que le mal s'enracine dans la liberté, pour Arendt en tant qu'il est “banal”, pour Levinas en tant qu'il s'avère “excessif” et “inutile”. Chez les trois cependant, le caractère énigmatique se présente comme une composante essentielle de la notion du mal, celui-ci étant envisagé dans chaque cas sous un angle différent, soit moral, soit politique, soit existentiel.

LA CONCEPTION ETHIQUE ET POLITIQUE DU MAL CHEZ PAUL RICOEUR. Conséquences pratiques à l'aune du contexte contemporain

GAËLLE FIASSE

Le problème du mal a traversé l'œuvre de Paul Ricoeur depuis ses écrits de jeunesse jusqu'à *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000) – dont l'épilogue analyse la faute et le pardon. Même l'œuvre posthume inachevée *Vivant jusqu'à la mort* (2007) n'ignore pas cette question. Ce thème du mal renvoie à différents aspects, à l'analyse des symboles (la souillure, le péché, la culpabilité), à la mort, mais plus encore à la souffrance et aux aléas de l'existence qui entourent l'homme «agissant et souffrant». La philosophie de l'action de Ricoeur culmine dans une réflexion sur les différentes capacités humaines, mais ces capacités sont toujours pensées sur fond de reconquête de soi et de passivité. Nous n'avons pas d'accès direct à nous-mêmes et pour découvrir l'ipséité, il faut un long chemin de détours. Or ce n'est pas seulement l'herméneutique, la philosophie de l'action et l'éthique qui se voient confrontées de façon directe ou indirecte à la question du mal. Les paradoxes du politique et du juste retiennent l'attention de Ricoeur, toujours soucieux face aux manques de fondement de la démocratie, et constamment hanté par les figures du mal liées au pouvoir.

Le présent article vise dès lors à prêter une attention renouvelée à sa conception du mal dans les écrits sur l'éthique et le politique, qui ont d'ailleurs récemment fait l'objet d'une attention inattendue puisque le président français Emmanuel Macron a été présenté comme un assistant de Ricoeur dans les médias français¹. C'est donc avec une curiosité aiguisée que le texte de Ricoeur «Le paradoxe politique» nourrira notre réflexion.

1. En réalité, le vainqueur des élections n'était pas son assistant, comme l'avait déjà souligné avec un certain agacement Myriam Revault d'Allonnes avant les résultats du premier tour, lorsqu'elle avait déclaré que les professeurs d'université avaient perdu leurs assistants après mai 1968 et que le candidat à la présidentielle n'était alors pas encore né. Cependant, c'est bien Emmanuel Macron qui a été l'auxiliaire de recherche qui a compilé les notes bibliographiques du recueil *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, une tâche ancillaire comme il se plaît à la nommer, mais qui a suscité la gratitude de Paul Ricoeur puisqu'il le remercie dans sa préface. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* [dans la suite abrégé MHO], Paris, Seuil, 2000, p. iii:

En rappelant plusieurs fils conducteurs de la pensée ricœurienne sur le mal, et en insistant en premier lieu sur l'héritage kantien, nous visons à mettre en lumière certaines conséquences pratiques de ces développements, tant sur le plan éthique que politique. Deux aspects retiendront particulièrement notre attention tout au long de cet article. Nous considérerons de façon privilégiée certaines conséquences des développements de Ricoeur sur le mal comme non-devoir-être, tout en traçant son origine. Pour le dire d'emblée, alors que nous nous sommes déjà prononcée ailleurs sur certaines dérives du mal pensé comme non-devoir-être en bio-éthique, surtout lorsque l'être souffrant devient subrepticement une «souffrance» perçue comme un mal à éradiquer à tout prix², dans ce présent article, nous prêterons davantage attention à certaines dérives du mal comme non-devoir-être sur le plan éthique et politique, lorsque le mal comme non-devoir-être devient un impératif. Comme notre propos n'est pas de limiter la pensée de Ricoeur à cet élément, nous considérerons d'autres aspects de son œuvre qui peuvent enrichir et contrebalancer une certaine absolutisation d'un impératif contre le mal. En effet, avant de regarder le mal comme «non-devoir-être», il reste que le mal «est» à travers une diversité de maux qui existent, ont existé, voire qui ne disparaîtront peut-être jamais. C'est pourquoi, l'insistance ricœurienne sur le travail sur soi visant à admettre la perte demeure un complément essentiel à sa définition du mal à combattre par l'action. L'homme agissant demeure pour Ricoeur «indivisément homme souffrant»³. La deuxième visée, plus pragmatique, de notre étude consiste à examiner comment Ricoeur envisage certains maux de notre époque, dont le terrorisme qui n'a malheureusement pas décéléré depuis le décès du philosophe en 2005. Ce deuxième aspect est lié au premier, dans la mesure où lorsque les chefs d'État décrivent le terrorisme comme un mal absolu à combattre de façon impérative comme un non-devoir-être, il reste important non seulement de s'interroger sur son intelligibilité propre, et non, à l'extrême inverse, de le banaliser, mais aussi de ne pas perdre de vue les dommages collatéraux intrinsèques à tout plan univoque d'éradication.

Nous mettrons dès lors en lumière comment Ricoeur conçoit le mal, en insistant sur les traces de sa lecture de Kant qui le conduisent à définir le mal comme non-devoir-être. Dans un deuxième temps, nous considérerons le mal dans son lien au politique et à la violence. Enfin, nous envisagerons d'autres regards sur le mal à partir de l'éthique de Ricoeur et de son herméneutique du soi comme agissant et souffrant.

« [...] enfin Emmanuel Macron à qui je dois une critique permanente de l'écriture et la mise en forme de l'appareil critique de cet ouvrage ».

2. Gaëlle FIASSE, «Respecter la fragilité du patient: défis et enjeux. Réflexions sur la souffrance comme non-devoir-être», *Les Cahiers francophones de soins palliatifs*, 17/2 (2017), p. 20-25.

3. Paul RICOEUR, «Le bonheur hors lieu», in Roger-Pol DROIT (ed.), *Où est le bonheur?*, Paris, Le Monde Éditions, 1994, p. 327.

I. Le mal: un autre dialogue avec Kant

Le mal-agir et le souffrir

Même si nous venons d'énumérer des représentations du mal très différentes – la culpabilité, la mort, la souffrance, le terrorisme – il va de soi que, lorsqu'il est question du mal en philosophie, le mal moral occupe d'emblée une place prédominante. Ricoeur n'ignore évidemment pas la différence entre le mal moral, volontaire, et le mal *souffert*. Il maintient la distinction de la *Critique de la raison pratique* entre *das Böse*, le mal dans son rapport à la volonté et *das Übel*, le mal de la douleur⁴. S'il revient sur le thème de la culpabilité dans l'épilogue de *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* et s'il note d'emblée le retentissement de la faute sur l'auteur de l'acte, il met aussi l'accent sur le mal subi, sur ce qui fait mal, sur la souffrance infligée par autrui. Qui plus est, il distingue la souffrance de la douleur, à laquelle il attribue davantage des connotations physiques, même s'il rappelle que les deux termes se chevauchent dans la langue française. Il réserve le terme souffrance, nous dit-il «à des affects ouverts sur la réflexivité, le langage, le rapport à soi, le rapport à autrui, le rapport au sens, au questionnement»⁵. Lorsqu'une personne souffre, c'est en effet son rapport à elle-même et aux autres qui se voit affecté jusque dans l'estime d'elle-même et dans la confiance en ses différentes capacités.

Le mal et la souffrance apparaissent dès lors comme deux pôles incontournables de l'herméneutique du soi. Ainsi, dans son dialogue avec Kant dans *Soi-même comme un autre* où il entend passer la visée éthique au crible de la norme, Ricoeur synthétise la région de l'obligation morale en ces termes, à savoir le «devoir [...] qui demande que ne soit pas ce qui ne doit pas être, à savoir le mal, et plus particulièrement que soient abolies les souffrances infligées à l'homme par l'homme»⁶. Le mal moral comme ce qui ne doit pas être est d'emblée situé face à la souffrance. Ce point central fait écho à son article «Le mal: un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie» où il éveille notre attention à ne pas laisser «sans réponse la protestation de la souffrance injuste»⁷. Il

4. Emmanuel KANT, *Critique de la raison pratique*, trad. Luc FERRY et Heinz WISMANN, dans *Oeuvres philosophiques II. Des prolégomènes aux écrits de 1791* («Bibliothèque de la Pléiade»), Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p. 680-681 : «Mais le bien et le mal désignés par les mots *Wohl* et *Übel* n'indiquent toujours qu'un rapport à ce qu'il peut y avoir d'*agréable* ou de *désagréable*, de plaisir ou de douleur dans notre état [...]. Mais le bien et le mal désignés par les mots *Gute* et *Böse* indiquent toujours un rapport à la *volonté*, en tant que celle-ci est déterminée par la *loi de la raison* à faire de quelque chose son objet...». Cité par Marc FAESSLER, «Le défi du mal. La méditation philosophique de Paul Ricoeur à l'épreuve du tragique», *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 65 (2009), p. 433.

5. Paul RICOEUR, «La souffrance n'est pas la douleur», *Psychiatrie française*, 92 (1992), p. 9.

6. Paul RICOEUR, *Soi-même comme un autre* [dans la suite abrégé SA], Paris, Seuil, 1990, p. 337.

7. Paul RICOEUR, «Le mal: un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie (1986)», in *Lectures 3. Aux frontières de la philosophie*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 220.

souligne cet aspect avec plus de véhémence encore face aux théodicées ou à la philosophie hégélienne de l'histoire qui, selon lui, englobent le tragique dans le panlogisme. Or la « souffrance, par la voix de la lamentation, est ce qui s'exclut du système»⁸. La pensée ricœurienne du mal se veut une réflexion sur l'injustifiable.

Ricoeur nous invite d'emblée à penser à la fois la distinction du mal-agir et du souffrir, leur réciproque et leur enchevêtrement. Alors que le mal moral comme action, découle de la responsabilité d'un agent, la souffrance, elle, est subie, nous ne la faisons pas arriver, elle nous affecte⁹. La souffrance n'est pas seulement causée par l'injustice infligée par autrui. Par ailleurs, même si elle se distingue de la douleur, la souffrance accompagne l'épreuve de la maladie, de la vieillesse et de la mort. Elle est aussi causée par des catastrophes naturelles. Cependant, l'action mauvaise a souvent pour corrélat d'engendrer de la souffrance : « L'homme fait souffrir l'homme. [...] La méchanceté, la violence, produisent de la souffrance¹⁰. » C'est pourquoi Ricoeur tient à la structure relationnelle du mal moral. Il déclare en effet : « Mal faire c'est toujours, à titre direct ou indirect, faire tort à autrui, donc le faire souffrir ; dans sa structure relationnelle – dialogique –, le mal commis par l'un trouve sa réplique dans le mal subi par l'autre¹¹. » Ainsi s'il rappelle que le mal chez Kant équivaut à une inversion dans l'ordre intime des maximes de notre action et ne se réduit ni à la sensibilité ni à la raison, Ricoeur souligne quant à lui l'aspect dialogique du mal¹².

Cette distinction entre l'action et la passivité n'empêche pas que ces deux pôles puissent être mêlés dans l'expérience. Du côté du mal moral, l'agent peut se sentir « victime en tant même qu'il est coupable»¹³ ou être blessé par sa propre action à cause de l'expérience de sa culpabilité¹⁴. Quant au pôle de la souffrance, Ricoeur perçoit cet enchevêtrement de l'agir et du pâtir lorsque la souffrance est vécue comme la punition d'une faute personnelle ou collective.

Renoncer à la question de l'origine du mal

Pourtant, même si ces deux figures du mal, le mal-agir et la souffrance, sont entremêlées dans l'expérience, mais aussi dans les mythes, Ricoeur préconise

8. Paul RICOEUR, « Le mal: un défi », p. 224.

9. Paul RICOEUR, « Le mal: un défi », p. 213 : « De là, la surprenante variété de ses causes: adversité de la nature physique, maladies et infirmités du corps et de l'esprit, affliction produite par la mort d'êtres chers, perspective effrayante de la mortalité propre, sentiment d'indignité personnelle, etc. ».

10. Paul RICOEUR, « Le scandale du mal », *Esprit*, juillet 2005, p. 105.

11. Paul RICOEUR, « Le mal: un défi », p. 213.

12. Paul Ricoeur, « Préface », in Olivier REBOUL, *Kant et le problème du mal*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1971, p. x.

13. Paul RICOEUR, « Le mal: un défi », p. 214.

14. Paul RICOEUR, MHO, p. 597.

de ne pas céder à la tentation de les confondre. Du côté du mal moral, l'auteur poursuit son travail d'élucidation des concepts jusque dans ses écrits tardifs, notamment dans ses deux volumes sur le Juste avec l'analyse des notions de responsabilité, d'imputabilité, d'accusation et de punition.

Ricoeur qui prête une attention plus soutenue aux symboles qu'aux mythes considère que « le mythe constraint, face à tout problème, à penser en termes d'origine: origine de toutes choses, origine du bien et du mal »¹⁵. Et Ricoeur de rappeler ces questions qui brandissent le scandale, mais qui invitent trop souvent à une réponse en termes d'origine: « Pourquoi le mal? Pourquoi trop de mal? Pourquoi moi? Pourquoi mes enfants? Pourquoi les enfants? ». L'auteur affirme avec véhémence qu'il faut se défaire au niveau théorique de la prétention d'imaginer l'origine du mal. Il s'agit de renoncer à la question « *Unde malum?* D'où vient le mal? » et de se situer « en avant, vers le futur »¹⁶.

Le mal, ce qui ne devrait pas être et doit être combattu

Ricoeur distingue, à ce titre, les écrits bibliques des mythes en général qui offrent une interprétation de l'origine du mal. Contre toute interprétation littérale, ce que même le mythe adamique du péché originel révèle à propos du mystère du mal, c'est que « chacun de nous le commence, l'inaugure [...], chacun de nous aussi le trouve, le trouve déjà là, en lui, hors de lui, avant lui; pour toute conscience qui s'éveille à la prise de responsabilité, le mal est déjà là »¹⁷. La figure biblique de Job retient aussi son attention et lui permet de souligner le « surcroît d'une souffrance absolument injuste »¹⁸, cette « discordance entre le mal moral et le mal-souffrance »¹⁹ contrairement à une pensée plus primitive, celle des mythes qui développent une pensée de la rétribution, qui se retrouverait sous la forme grossière: « toute souffrance est méritée parce qu'elle est la punition d'un péché individuel ou collectif, connu ou inconnu »²⁰.

Au delà de la rétribution, il s'agit de renoncer, d'une certaine façon comme Job et *contre* les mythes des grands récits fondateurs, à la question du pourquoi. C'est ici qu'un premier élément de réponse face au mal se fait jour: « Le mal est une catégorie de l'action et non de la théorie. Le mal, c'est ce contre quoi

15. Paul RICOEUR, « Le scandale », *op. cit.*, p. 106.

16. Paul RICOEUR, « Le scandale du mal », p. 106.

17. Paul RICOEUR, « Le « péché originel »: étude de signification », in *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique* (« Points. Essais », 706), Paris, Seuil, 1969, p. 382.

18. Paul RICOEUR, « Le scandale du mal », p. 107.

19. Paul RICOEUR, « Le mal: un défi », p. 217.

20. Paul RICOEUR, « Le mal: un défi », p. 216.

on lutte, quand on a renoncé à l'expliquer²¹.» Le mal s'apparente dès lors à «une donnée inexplicable, un fait brut». Mais «il est toujours déjà là»²².

Ricoeur y insiste: «Le mal, c'est ce qui est et ne devrait pas être, mais dont nous ne pouvons pas dire pourquoi cela est. C'est le non-devoir-être²³.» Comme dans la *Critique de la raison pure* en sa partie «Dialectique», le mal «relève uniquement de la sphère pratique, comme cela qui ne doit pas être et que l'action doit combattre²⁴».

Dans la huitième étude de *Soi-même comme un autre*, nous l'avons déjà évoqué, Ricoeur discute de la nécessité du recours à la norme, en dialoguant avec la morale kantienne et il y exprime la même idée. Le mal, comme la culpabilité ou la faute, est toujours déjà là. Ricoeur propose dès lors cette reformulation de l'obligation morale: «Agis uniquement d'après la maxime qui fait que tu peux vouloir en même temps que *ne soit pas ce qui ne devrait pas être*, à savoir le mal²⁵.» Cet impératif fait suite à une réflexion sur le libre-arbitre chez Kant. Ricoeur vise en effet à contrer l'idée d'une fatalité du mal et à maintenir le caractère scandaleux du mal qui appelle à l'action et à la lutte.

La propension au mal face à la disposition au bien

Ricoeur hérite également de Kant l'idée que la propension au mal n'efface pas la disposition au bien. En relisant l'«Essai sur le mal radical» de Kant dans *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, il maintient que le mal est radical mais non pas originaire. Comme l'a relevé Michaël Foessel, «le mal se trouve à la racine insondable de la volonté, irréductible à toute explication par les causes»²⁶. Ricoeur en ce sens cite Kant: «Par penchant (*propensio*), je caractérise le fondement subjectif de la possibilité d'une inclination (désir habituel, *concupiscentia*), pour autant qu'en rapport à l'humanité en général elle est contingente²⁷.» Ce mal qui ne devrait pas être est contingent, il pourrait ne

21. Paul RICOEUR, «Le scandale du mal», p. 107.

22. Paul RICOEUR, «Le scandale du mal», p. 109: «On objectera à tout ceci que la Bible connaît un mythe de création. Cela est vrai. Mais les récits bibliques de création diffèrent fondamentalement des mythes auxquels ils empruntent, en ceci qu'ils constituent la grandiose préface d'un drame essentiellement tourné vers le futur, plus précisément l'élection d'Abraham en Genèse 12. En ce sens, ils annoncent la possibilité d'une humanité qui, elle-même, se trouve dès l'origine confrontée avec le mal. [...] Le mal est toujours déjà là, comme ce avec quoi combat un acte de création qui est le début d'un acte de rédemption.»

23. Paul RICOEUR, «Le scandale du mal», p. 110.

24. Paul RICOEUR, «Le mal: un défi», p. 222.

25. Paul RICOEUR, SA, huitième étude, première section, p. 254.

26. Michaël FOESSEL, «La contingence du mal [chez Paul Ricoeur]», *Magazine littéraire. Paul Ricoeur, morale, histoire, religion: une philosophie de l'existence*, no 390 (2000), p. 44.

27. Emmanuel KANT, «Essai sur le mal radical», trad. Alexis PHILONENKO, in *La Religion dans les limites de la simple raison* (1793), *Oeuvres philosophiques*, t. III, *Les derniers écrits* («Bibliothèque de la Pléiade»), Ferdinand ALQUIÉ (dir.), Paris, Gallimard, 1986, [VI, 28], I^e, II, p. 40; Paul RICOEUR, SA, p. 252-253, note 2; Paul RICOEUR, MHO, p. 640.

pas être. Cette contingence du mal joue un rôle à un autre égard, puisqu'elle permet de creuser l'écart entre l'agent et l'action. Même dans le cas où l'action est réputée universellement mauvaise et « universellement déplorable et déplorée », il reste que l'innocence n'est peut-être pas totalement abolie. Un tel écart conduit Ricoeur à se demander ce qu'il en est des ressources de régénération restées intactes et ultimement à s'interroger sur le pardon. Par ailleurs, si Ricoeur insiste sur l'aspect pratique « Que faire contre le mal ? », il entend ne pas perdre de vue l'autre aspect du mal, à savoir la souffrance. Il pointe du doigt la nécessité d'une action éthique ou politique capable de diminuer la violence et dès lors la souffrance faite à autrui.

Considérations sur le mal comme non-devoir-être

Les grands contours du mal chez Ricoeur ayant été rappelés, il nous importe d'offrir une analyse critique du mal comme non-devoir-être. Lorsque les figures du mal qui-ne-devraient-pas-être sont nommées, il paraît certes plus aisément de soupeser le poids de l'action. Si nous affirmons par exemple que la maltraitance des enfants devrait ne pas être, c'est précisément en prenant cette affirmation comme ligne de conduite que nous pouvons nous dévouer à agir contre cette figure du mal particulière. Mais une telle affirmation ne signifie pas que nous puissions croire que la maltraitance disparaîtra un jour totalement.

Il faut dès lors comprendre l'expression de Ricoeur sur le mal comme non-devoir-être à l'aune de ses remarques sur la perte de l'innocence, à savoir « quelque chose qui aurait pu ne pas arriver »²⁸. Ricoeur affirme dans *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* : « L'idée se propose d'un mal toujours déjà là dans l'empirie et pourtant foncièrement contingent dans l'ordre primordial²⁹. » Reprenant le thème des situations limites, hérité de Karl Jaspers, il considère que ces situations limites font partie de notre condition historique.

Il est nécessaire de garder à l'esprit l'intention de Ricoeur de quitter la pensée spéculative sur l'origine pour se concentrer sur l'action face au mal. Toutefois, sans une insistance sur l'existence du mal et sa possibilité, l'expression générale du mal comme ce-qui-ne-devrait-pas-être risque de conduire à une velléité impossible à atteindre ou à un manque de réalisme de peur d'essentialiser le mal.

Or lorsque les politiques tentent de supprimer à n'importe quel prix les risques face au mal et lorsque celui-ci est pensé comme un absolu qui ne doit pas être, les mécanismes de défense se rigidifient. Le contrôle et la sécurité se voient privilégiés au nom de la stabilité, mais parfois avec comme corollaire

28. Paul RICOEUR, MHO, p. 602.

29. *Ibid.*

de limiter les libertés les plus élémentaires et de nuire au vivre ensemble. Au lieu de décrire le mal comme non-devoir-être, ne semble-t-il pas préférable d'insister davantage sur la possibilité du mal et son existence, sans oublier corrélativement le combat pour le réduire ? N'est-il pas préférable de parler d'un mal qui est, qui ne sera jamais totalement éradiqué, mais dont l'enjeu gît néanmoins dans sa réduction, plutôt que d'un mal qui ne devrait pas être ? Ne faut-il pas en outre ne pas perdre de vue la diversité des maux ?

Les lois contre le terrorisme, décrites sous le signe de la « tolérance zéro » conduisent à une violation des droits primaires de citoyens innocents, parce que l'impératif se voit pensé comme un absolu dans l'ordre pratique et que l'utopie engendre des mesures idéologiques drastiques. Dans le même ordre d'idées, les lois contre le racket ou l'intimidation à l'école qui visent à proscrire absolument tout échange d'objets entre les enfants empêchent toute possibilité de partage amical et distillent le soupçon dans les relations les plus innocentes. Même les lois contre la maltraitance des enfants peuvent aboutir à une suspicion généralisée des éducateurs et des parents qui n'est pas sans conséquence. Il importe dès lors de regarder l'autre côté du balancier lorsque le jugement d'existence sur le mal et sa prise en compte cèdent le pas à un impératif absolu de non-devoir-être, d'autant qu'il y a toujours plusieurs figures du mal.

II. Le mal, le politique et la violence

Ces remarques sur les conséquences pratiques d'une pensée du mal comme non-devoir-être nous conduisent à examiner la notion de mal politique dans la pensée de Ricoeur à travers le thème de la violence. Le binôme action-passivité en constitue un point d'accès incontournable. Il est toujours question chez Ricoeur d'une dissymétrie originale, dans la mesure où l'« agent » de l'action se trouve confronté au « patient » de son action³⁰. Ses nombreux commentaires sur la Règle d'Or abondent en ce sens, ainsi que ses différentes remarques sur la nécessité morale de rétablir la symétrie dans les relations d'interaction : « Toute action est action sur..., donc source de dissymétrie entre l'auteur de l'action et son récepteur³¹. » Certes, Ricoeur prend soin de déclarer que « le patient n'est pas nécessairement un souffrant, donc une victime »³². Mais il vise à nous « alerter ». De par la structure du vis-à-vis « agent » et « celui qui reçoit cette action », le faire n'a pas seulement en face de lui un autre faire, mais un subir, un pâtir. En d'autres termes, il nous invite à garder à l'esprit la réciproque de notre action, à ne pas ignorer la réflexivité de notre action sur autrui, d'où la nécessité selon lui d'une règle de réciprocité. Dès lors que nous

30. Paul RICOEUR, « Préface. Ce que la torture enseigne », in André JACQUES, *L'interdit ou la torture en procès*, Paris, Cerf, 1994, p. 10.

31. Paul RICOEUR, MHO, p. 600.

32. Paul RICOEUR, « Préface. Ce que la torture ... », p. 10.

agissons sur quelqu'un, il faut être attentif aux nombreux risques que cette puissance implique. Dans *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur décline les différentes formes de violence, de la simple influence de l'un sur l'autre à la torture et au viol.

La Règle d'Or joue un rôle prépondérant dans son éthique puisqu'elle permet de regarder la réciproque de notre action : « Ne fais pas à autrui ce que tu ne voudrais pas qu'il te soit fait. » Elle sert à faire la transition entre la vie bonne avec et pour l'autre et la deuxième formulation de l'impératif catégorique : « Agis de telle sorte que tu traites l'humanité aussi bien dans ta personne que dans la personne de tout autre toujours en même temps comme une fin, et jamais simplement comme un moyen³³. » Grâce à la Règle d'Or, il s'agit de se projeter en imagination pour voir les effets néfastes de sa propre action sur autrui. Ricoeur prend soin de remarquer qu'il n'est jamais question d'occuper sa place, car ce serait le « chasser de sa place... »³⁴ et lui faire violence, mais d'examiner ce que notre action risque de lui faire subir. Cet adage ne rejoint pas seulement la problématique du mal moral. Il est également présent dans la méditation ricœurienne de la souffrance et de la douleur. Comme dans l'exemple du médecin face à un malade en grande situation de fragilité, ou face à un mourant, l'enjeu consiste à « rejoindre l'autre à sa place, mais sans se substituer à lui »³⁵. Parallèlement, Ricoeur insiste sur l'invitation à porter secours au fragile, sans oublier ses capacités. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de se sentir enjoint par lui, de lui porter secours, mais aussi de l'aider à croître, de lui permettre « accomplissement et épanouissement »³⁶.

Si la réflexion sur l'action permet de mettre en lumière comment Ricoeur envisage en premier lieu le thème de la violence, à savoir comme un risque sous-jacent à l'action sur autrui, il convient également de rappeler comment il situe le pouvoir. Au cœur de sa triade éthique – la vie bonne avec et pour l'autre dans des institutions justes – Ricoeur vise à donner une assise au vivre-ensemble. En situant le juste entre le légal et le bon, il entend ne pas oublier l'agir en commun et l'implication de chacun au sein des institutions justes. Il ne suffit pas de penser les institutions comme systèmes de distribution de parts justes, encore faut-il ne pas mésestimer l'implication de chacun, sa participation. La pluralité, constitutive du pouvoir, implique en outre des tiers. Elle ne se laisse pas reconstruire à partir de relations interpersonnelles sous le modèle

33. Emmanuel KANT, *Fondements de la métaphysique des mœurs*, trad. Victor DELBOS rev. par Ferdinand ALQUIÉ, in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, t. II, *Des Prolégomènes aux écrits de 1791* (coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade »), Paris, Gallimard, 1985, II^e section [IV, 429], p. 295.

34. Paul RICOEUR, « L'éthique, entre le mal et le pire », in *Philosophie, éthique et politique. Entretiens et dialogues*, textes préparés et présentés par Catherine GOLDENSTEIN, Paris, Seuil, 2017, p. 178.

35. Paul RICOEUR, « L'éthique, entre le mal et le pire », p. 178.

36. Paul RICOEUR, « Responsabilité et fragilité », *Autres Temps*, n° 76-77 (2003), p. 128.

dyadique³⁷. Pour le dire plus simplement, le politique a son intelligibilité propre et sa violence spécifique. Faisant bien le contraste entre le pouvoir du peuple (*potestas in populo*) et l'autorité du sénat (*auctoritas in senatu*), il rappelle, en relisant Hannah Arendt, sans concéder à la naïveté ou à la nostalgie, que le pouvoir ne se réduit pas à l'idée de domination et qu'il est une aptitude à agir de façon concertée, même si les relations de domination oblitèrent « cette strate du pouvoir caractérisée par la pluralité et la concertation » au point de lui donner le « statut de l'oublié »³⁸.

Cette façon d'envisager le pouvoir politique n'occulte pas non plus les violences instauratrices d'un État durable ni la violence intrinsèque à l'État, qui jouit dès lors du monopole du pouvoir légitime de contrainte. Son propos est de réfléchir à la violence commise au nom de l'État, qui demeure empreinte de l'esprit de vengeance³⁹. Pourtant, Ricoeur admet également qu'on « ne peut concevoir une structure politique qui ne disposerait pas de l'usage légitime de la violence à certains moments »⁴⁰. Le « non, tu ne feras pas » reste indispensable.

Dès lors si Ricoeur insiste sur la distinction entre violence et pouvoir, il met aussi en évidence la rationalité du politique et ses maux spécifiques. Les maux politiques ne sont pas « réductibles à d'autres, en particulier à l'aliénation économique »⁴¹. Ce que Ricoeur nomme le « paradoxe politique » consiste précisément en cette dualité, paradoxale et indissociable, à savoir une rationalité spécifique du pouvoir politique⁴², mais aussi des possibilités de perversion qui lui sont propres⁴³ et malheureusement récurrentes. Il reste une forme

37. Car non seulement il n'y a pas de continuité entre le lien interpersonnel et la dimension politique, mais « le lien politique a la réalité de l'idéalité », puisque le contrat social est un pacte qui n'a pas réellement lieu. Paul RICOEUR, « Le paradoxe politique », in *Histoire et vérité* (« Points. Essai », 468), Paris, Seuil, 1967, p. 300.

38. Paul RICOEUR, SA, p. 230.

39. Cf. Paul RICOEUR, « Sanction, réhabilitation, pardon », in *Le Juste*, Paris, Esprit, 1995, en particulier p. 207-208 ; « Justice et vengeance », in *Le Juste 2*, Paris, Esprit, 2001, pp. 257-266. Nous pourrions nous demander si une perspective moins pessimiste ne distinguerait pas davantage la force de la violence. Nous remercions Xavier Dijon pour cette remarque critique. Autrement dit, si Ricoeur distingue violence et pouvoir, il s'agirait aussi de préciser davantage la différence entre l'usage de la force (et de la contrainte) par le pouvoir et l'usage de la violence.

40. Paul RICOEUR, « L'Éthique, la morale et la règle », *Autres Temps*, 24 (1989-1990), p. 57.

41. Paul RICOEUR, « Le paradoxe politique », p. 295. Ricoeur remarque d'une part que des changements radicaux dans la sphère économique n'affectent pas radicalement l'État en tant qu'il exprime le vouloir fondamental de la nation dans son ensemble. Par ailleurs, il souligne aussi des maux propres à la rationalité du politique. « Par conséquent l'exploitation économique peut disparaître et le mal politique persister. » Voir aussi : « [...] je pense même que le grand malheur qui frappe toute l'œuvre du marxisme-léninisme et qui pèse sur les régimes que le marxisme a engendrés, c'est cette réduction du mal politique au mal économique ; de là l'illusion qu'une société libérée des contradictions de la société bourgeoise serait libérée aussi de l'aliénation politique » (p. 307) ; « le marxisme réduit toutes les aliénations à l'aliénation économique et sociale » (p. 309).

42. Paul RICOEUR, « Le paradoxe politique », p. 310.

43. Paul RICOEUR, « Le paradoxe politique », p. 295.

spécifique de la représentation du pouvoir qui ne se laisse pas réduire à la domination, dans la mesure où une reconnaissance mutuelle s'instaure entre les individus et l'instance supérieure du pouvoir. Et Ricoeur de souligner, « [...] ne cessent de s'affronter au sein de la même instance la forme et la force »⁴⁴.

Toutefois, si Ricoeur accorde autant de place au thème des institutions justes dans sa petite éthique, c'est aussi parce qu'il ne perd jamais de vue le spectre des « événements monstrueux du XX^e siècle liés au phénomène totalitaire »⁴⁵. Il rappelle également la perversion possible des peuples et, commentant Hegel, la possibilité d'une *Sittlichkeit* meurtrière. Il cite en note le texte de Václav Havel, « Le pouvoir des sans-pouvoir ». Václav Havel y décortique les strates du pouvoir du régime communiste, qu'il nomme dictatorial « post-totalitaire » pour le distinguer des dictatures classiques. Il examine son influence sur les individus à tous les niveaux de l'existence humaine, au même titre qu'une religion sécularisée. Si le pouvoir sert l'idéologie plutôt que les individus⁴⁶, face à la dictature et aux exécuteurs de sanctions, restent les dissidents.

L'analyse du paradoxe politique a conduit Ricoeur à mettre en exergue les dérives spécifiques de l'État socialiste et de l'État libéral et à rappeler des éléments de discernement contre les abus de pouvoir. Autant d'évidences mais qui ne sont pas toujours des truismes face aux élections des chefs d'État sur le plan international. Il rappelle l'indépendance du juge et de l'exercice de la justice ; l'accès des citoyens à des sources d'information, de connaissance, de science, indépendantes de celles de l'État. Il revient plusieurs fois sur la possibilité d'une expression publique des opinions, ce qu'il exprime par la « publicité » (le fait de rendre public) et l'espace public⁴⁷. Il mentionne une « certaine dialectique entre l'État et les conseils des ouvriers », les syndicats. Enfin, point crucial, il insiste sur le contrôle de l'État par la base démocratiquement organisée, notamment à travers la discussion organisée ou le pluralisme des partis.

Quant à l'autre spectre, la violence terroriste, peut-on y déceler aussi un mal spécifique ? Ricoeur n'est pas un polémiste. Il n'aborde pas les questions sensibles comme le terrorisme, la torture, la peine de mort en tant que telles. Il les affronte de façon directe, mais dans des écrits plus secondaires, à savoir des préfaces de livres qui traitent de la question ou des entrevues. Ainsi, dans un dialogue avec Stanislas Breton, paru dans un journal français après le

44. Paul RICOEUR, SA, p. 299.

45. Paul RICOEUR, SA, p. 298 : « Quand l'esprit d'un peuple est perverti au point de nourrir une *Sittlichkeit* meurtrière, c'est finalement dans la conscience morale d'un petit nombre d'individus, inaccessibles à la peur et à la corruption, que se réfugie l'esprit qui a déserté des institutions devenues criminelles. »

46. Václav HAVEL, « Le pouvoir des sans-pouvoir », in *Essais Politiques*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1990, p. 79.

47. Paul RICOEUR, SA, p. 229.

11 septembre 2001⁴⁸, Ricoeur met l'accent sur le phénomène de régression que peut représenter un total engagement pour une cause absolue où meurtre et suicide sont liés. C'est dans cette conjonction du meurtre indiscriminé et du suicide qu'il observe un saut qualitatif dans la pratique du terrorisme. La levée des interdits fondamentaux représente une régression. Toutes les fins ne justifient pas tous les moyens. Au nom des revendications pour la justice, l'auteur affirme que le terrorisme fait dévier les révolutions et il invite à protester contre une telle déviation.

III. D'autres regards sur le mal à partir de l'éthique et de l'herméneutique du soi

La rationalité spécifique du politique n'est cependant pas séparable des principes éthiques censés sous-tendre les décisions politiques. Elle n'élude pas non plus les responsabilités individuelles de chaque citoyen. Dans un article de presse sur le droit d'intervention des États pour venir en aide aux victimes, Ricoeur rappelle à ce titre certains principes moraux élémentaires, à savoir la nécessité d'isoler l'agenda humanitaire d'autres intérêts moins nobles que pourraient avoir les États interventionnistes. Il insiste sur le devoir de porter secours aux victimes, car la souffrance oblige et que la vie vaut d'être « préservée, protégée, accrue». Le devoir de porter secours est un impératif catégorique qui dérive de celui «plus formel, de traiter les personnes comme des fins et non pas seulement comme des moyens»⁴⁹. Quant aux responsabilités individuelles et à la sphère du soi, un exemple palpable concerne l'accueil des migrants. Lorsque Ricoeur discute du statut des migrants, à partir de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme de 1948, ou de la Convention de Genève de 1951 sur les réfugiés, il invite les États souverains à ne pas contredire la tradition d'asile et de protection des droits des libertés des personnes. Cependant, loin d'être son dernier mot, il mène en parallèle une interrogation au cœur de l'ipséité en appelant à se penser soi-même comme étranger, à ne pas craindre les failles de l'identité, afin de combattre les sentiments de xénophobie⁵⁰.

La protestation de Ricoeur est bien celle de l'analyste et du philosophe, même si «l'élucidation des concepts» est en perpétuel «va-et-vient avec l'insér-

48. Paul RICOEUR, «Décrypter la violence terroriste» [Interview de Paul Ricoeur], *La Croix*, 25-10-01.

49. Paul RICOEUR, «L'intervention: entre la souffrance des victimes et la violence des secours», in *Libération* n° 3910 (1993), republié dans *Esprit* (février 1994), p. 155.

50. Paul RICOEUR, «Étranger moi-même», in *L'immigration, défis et richesses: LXXII^e session des Semaines sociales de France, tenue à Issy-les-Moulineaux et intitulée «Les migrants, défis et richesse pour notre société»>, Paris, Bayard-Éditions Centurion, p. 93-110; Paul RICOEUR, «La condition d'étranger», *Esprit* (mars-avril 2006), p. 264-275.*

tion dans la cité»⁵¹. Dans le même ordre d'idées, lorsque Ricoeur expose «les raisons de condamner absolument, inconditionnellement la torture», c'est à la visée éthique qu'il fait appel. Il réfute les raisons instrumentales, stratégiques de part et d'autre des deux camps, ceux qui évoquent la morale de détresse pour justifier la torture dans le but d'éviter le pire, ou ceux qui rétorquent que la torture est une solution à court terme, mais ruineuse à long terme en raison de la «chaîne de représailles qu'elle déclenche ou renforce»⁵², un argument que Ricoeur considère non dénué de force mais trop superficiel et qui reste fondamentalement instrumental.

Il pointe dès lors l'*estime de soi* au cœur de sa petite éthique en faisant appel à notre indignation face à la torture. La torture conduit le torturé à être abaissé «au-dessous du seuil de l'estime de soi» et Ricoeur d'évoquer le «noyau même de l'être personnel dans sa singularité insubstituable»⁵³. Il ne se réfère pas directement à l'obligation morale qui respecte l'humanité dans ma personne ou dans la personne d'autrui. Selon sa méthode, le singulier précède l'universel, l'éthique prime sur la moralité. Ce qui précède l'obligation est le «primat éthique de l'estime de soi, par le truchement de la compassion»⁵⁴. De la même façon, la négativité renvoie à une affirmation originale. Dans ce cas précis, «le «non» hurlé par l'indignation est l'envers du oui réfléchi que nous donnons au primat éthique de l'estime de soi, par le truchement de la compassion»⁵⁵. Ricoeur décline alors les différentes capacités qui rendent l'homme digne d'estime, les capacités de parler, de faire, de se raconter, de se poser comme agent en imputant ses actions à soi-même. Il voit dans la torture la tentative pour détruire l'homme capable. De manière analogue, lorsqu'il analyse le procès dans ses ouvrages consacrés à la question du juste, il prend soin de regarder l'accusé, mais aussi la victime et le rôle bénéfique de la reconnaissance publique de son être offensé et humilié. En mentionnant que d'une certaine façon l'estime de soi est restaurée, il précise le sens du mot estime, ce terme si souvent convoqué, à savoir «la dignité attachée à la qualité morale de la personne humaine»⁵⁶.

L'ontologie qui sous-tend les capacités de «l'homme agissant et souffrant» est elle aussi un indice révélateur des réponses avancées par Ricoeur. Celui-ci revisite les sens de l'être, en particulier celui de la puissance et de l'acte, au détriment de la catégorie de l'être comme substance qu'il entend rejeter. Son ontologie a une incidence directe sur la question du mal. En effet, craignant d'essentialiser le mal, c'est bien à partir des capacités qu'il l'analyse. Il n'est

51. Myriam REVault D'ALLONNES, «Les paradoxes du politique», in *Magazine littéraire*, 390 (2000): *Paul Ricoeur, morale, histoire, religion: une philosophie de l'existence*, p. 63.

52. Paul RICOEUR, «Préface. Ce que la torture...», p. 13.

53. Paul RICOEUR, «Préface. Ce que la torture ...», p. 14.

54. Paul RICOEUR, «Préface. Ce que la torture ...», p. 16.

55. Paul RICOEUR, «Préface. Ce que la torture ...», p. 16.

56. Paul RICOEUR, *Le Juste*, p. 199.

donc pas étonnant qu'il trouve une réponse à la torture en soulignant les quatre capacités mises en exergue dans *Soi-même comme un autre*. Il regarde aussi le mal à la lumière de ce qui paralyse la puissance d'agir, et cela vaut autant pour la victime que pour l'offenseur, comme en témoignent ses pages sur l'analyse de la faute morale dans la *Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. La philosophie de Kant n'est jamais très loin, en particulier son ouvrage *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*. La substance laisse sa place à un acte de foi, où il s'agit de croire en la bonté originale afin de pouvoir regarder au-delà de l'action. À la suite de Kant, il considère que la religion permet de vivifier les ressources de bonté.

Outre le thème de l'estime de soi et celui des capacités, la limitation de la pulsion de vengeance éclaire d'autres problématiques que Ricoeur ne fait qu'effleurer, comme celle de la peine de mort. Selon sa méthode du corps à corps, à savoir de toujours prendre en considération les arguments opposés aux siens, il note que, chez Hegel, la peine de mort est «une façon d'honorer le coupable en tant qu'être rationnel»⁵⁷. Or Ricoeur répond à Hegel en invoquant l'idée de l'État. Il précise: « [...] l'État, en limitant sa propre pulsion de vengeance, s'interdit de se comporter lui aussi comme criminel sous la figure du bourreau»⁵⁸.

D'autres éléments de réponse au mal peuvent être trouvés dans la philosophie de Ricoeur, notamment dans son épilogue sur le pardon dans *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Que faire face à ce mal qui excède parfois tout modèle de dignité, comme dans le cas des crimes contre l'humanité? Or avant de parler du pardon, Ricoeur souligne l'importance de la faute, et donc du mal qui, dans le cas de base, atteint à la fois le sujet, responsable du mal, mais aussi la victime qui souffre du mal subi, lorsqu'elle est toujours en vie. Ricoeur ne veut pas créer de l'impunité, et son travail philosophique consiste justement à distinguer le point de vue juridique de la question philosophique du pardon qui ne se pose qu'au niveau interpersonnel⁵⁹. Le pardon n'est pas à confondre avec l'amnistie et encore moins avec le phénomène de la prescription.

Mais quelle attitude adopter face à la faute? Quelle que soit la peine qu'entraîne le travail de reconnaissance de la faute, Ricoeur n'entend pas nier sa réalité. Comme face à la torture, sa philosophie de l'homme capable et souffrant oriente son angle d'attaque. Il souligne à quel point la faute peut paralyser la puissance d'agir, mais c'est sans doute parce qu'il regarde d'emblée le mal à partir de la culpabilité et de l'aveu. « La reconnaissance de soi, affirme-

57. Paul RICOEUR, «Sanction, ...», p. 201.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Paul RICOEUR, «Memory, history, forgiveness: A dialogue between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi», *Janus head*, 8 (2005), p. 9: «Forgiveness is a personal act, an act from person to person that does not concern juridical institutions.».

t-il, est indivisément action et passion, action de mal agir et passion d'être affecté par sa propre action⁶⁰».

Son analyse complexe du thème du pardon est redéivable de la fameuse assertion de Derrida, à savoir que le pardon ne s'adresse qu'à de l'impardonnable et que dès lors le pardon s'avère impossible. Ricoeur développe en filigranes un pardon (presque) impossible avec le presque entre parenthèses. Or ce n'est sans doute pas l'influence de Derrida qui s'avère le point le plus intéressant. Le grand mérite de l'analyse ricœurienne est d'avoir placé le pardon autour de deux axes et de n'avoir négligé ni l'un ni l'autre. Ricoeur regarde le pardon à partir de la personne coupable en décortiquant, en bas de l'axe vertical, la profondeur de la culpabilité, de la faute, le lien entre l'agent et l'action mauvaise, et à l'opposé, en hauteur, le pardon. Mais cette hauteur se voit aussi croisée par une dimension horizontale, ce qui permet de regarder la possibilité de l'échange entre l'offenseur et la victime et de ne pas réduire l'analyse du pardon aux cas extrêmes.

Pour le propos qui nous intéresse, à savoir le mal, il vaut la peine d'insister sur le travail de deuil que Ricoeur mentionne à la lumière de ses réflexions sur l'oubli dans son épilogue sur le pardon. L'admission de la perte s'annonce comme un « incognito du pardon »⁶¹. Ricoeur déclare à ce titre : « Il nous faut accepter qu'il y ait de l'irréparable dans nos possessions, de l'irréconciliable dans nos conflits, de l'indéchiffrable dans nos destinées⁶². »

Nous avons évoqué certaines réserves par rapport au mal comme non-devoir-être, dans la mesure où cette façon d'envisager le mal pourrait conduire à refuser toute confiance et toute prise de risque, surtout envers un mal à venir. Au lieu de réduire le mal à sa perspective morale, à savoir un mal qui s'éprouve comme « non-devoir-être », il reste important d'assumer le mal qui est et qui est fait. Or cette acceptation ne peut se faire sans un travail de deuil à la fois pour celui qui a commis le mal et pour celui qui en a souffert. Nous pourrions sans doute, selon une lecture généreuse, remarquer qu'une conception du mal comme non-devoir-être peut donner l'assurance aux victimes qu'elles n'étaient pas responsables du mal commis contre elles. Le mal reste contingent. Il n'est pas un destin. Mais une plus grande insistance sur la réalité du mal, dans un jugement d'existence, nous semblerait salutaire dans la mesure où elle oblige à quitter l'imaginaire d'un mal qui ne devrait pas être là et à l'affronter avec les différentes ressources possibles. Le travail de deuil, souligné par Ricoeur, à la suite de Freud, en est une. L'insistance sur les capacités et l'estime de soi en sont une autre.

60. Paul RICOEUR, MHO, p. 598.

61. Paul RICOEUR, MHO, p. 653.

62. Paul RICOEUR, « Le bon usage des blessures de la mémoire (2002) », in *Les résistances sur le Plateau Vivarais – Lignon (1938-1945); Témoins, témoignages et lieux de mémoires. Les oubliés de l'histoire parlent*, Roure, Éditions du Roure, 2005, p. 7.

Ricoeur évoque également les limites de la philosophie et son ouverture vers une voix sapientiale lorsqu'il se tourne vers l'opuscule kantien *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*. Nous aimerais aussi attirer l'attention sur une autre dimension, à savoir la vie avec et pour l'autre, mise en exergue dans son éthique. Confrontés au mal commis ou au mal subi, nous ne sommes pas seuls. Il importe donc de voir les ressources d'aide que d'autres personnes peuvent offrir. Ricoeur a développé, dans sa section sur la sagesse pratique, l'enjeu des cellules de conseil au niveau de la bio-éthique, lorsque des situations graves sont à prendre pour les souffrants en milieu hospitalier. L'analogie avec les cellules de soutien mises en place par les équipes de justice restauratrice pour les victimes et les détenus est signifiante. Il reste aussi bien évidemment la présence des amis et des personnes proches. Même si la culpabilité et la souffrance sont des épreuves de solitude indépassable de l'ipséité, il reste que le soutien d'une altérité bienveillante face au mal s'avère elle aussi inestimable.

*Département de philosophie
Université McGill
Montréal*

S O M M A I R E

Cet article analyse la diversité des acceptations du mal chez Paul Ricoeur à partir de l'influence kantienne. Il explique pourquoi Ricoeur renonce à la question de l'origine du mal. Le point central concerne l'imperatif moral de combattre le mal en tant que ce qui ne devrait pas être. Il souligne plusieurs failles de cette approche morale, dont le risque de transformer l'imperatif en utopie morale et politique. Il met ensuite en évidence le mal dans son lien au politique et à la violence. Enfin, il souligne d'autres aspects du mal comme le terrorisme, la torture, la peine de mort, en analysant comment Ricoeur se sert de l'éthique et de l'herméneutique du soi pour les aborder, notamment à partir des différentes capacités affectées par la souffrance. Face au mal comme non-devoir-être, l'insistance sur la perte et le deuil s'avère essentielle ainsi que la reconnaissance de la pluralité des maux.

S U M M A R Y

This article explores the diverse meanings of evil in Ricoeur's philosophy by emphasizing Kant's influence and explaining why Ricoeur renounces the question of the origins of evil. The central argument is based on a definition of evil in terms of what-ought-not-to-be so of what must be fought against through action. It underlines the risks of transforming this imperative into a moral and political utopia and takes note of evil in political sphere and violence. Different aspects of evil, such as terrorism, torture, and the death penalty, are

discussed by looking at how Ricoeur uses his ethics and his hermeneutics of the self in order to confront them, in particular, by stressing how different capacities are affected by suffering. Ultimately, when evil is conceived of as what ought-not-to-be, it is crucial to recognize the losses and the necessity of undergoing a work of mourning, as well as to take into consideration the plurality of evils.

PATHWAYS ACROSS DARKNESS. Contemporary Evil and the Task of Philosophy

FRANCESCA BRENCIO

I. Preliminary remarks

The title of this paper could sound a bit pretentious both to the big public and to the philosophical audience. Why do we need another work that wants to address something about the task of philosophy? Haven't we spent the last century – just to provide an historical horizon – practicing philosophy and questioning its task, trying to overcome the well-known distinction between continental and analytic philosophy?

My answer is quite problematic: yes, because in our life, as people who are deeply committed to philosophy, we have exercised (and we are still exercising) philosophy through the meditation on, and dialogue with, some great philosophers; no, basically two reasons that are mainly at the core of this paper: on the one hand, western philosophy has its own responsibility in the issue of evil. Using Arendt's words: "I suspect that philosophy is not altogether innocent in this fine how-do-you-do. Not, of course, in the sense that Hitler had anything to do with Plato [...]. Instead, perhaps in the sense that Western philosophy has never had a clear concept of what constitutes the political, and couldn't have one, because, by necessity, it spoke of man the individual and dealt with the fact of plurality tangentially."¹ Put in other words, this means that our philosophical tradition has been focused only on those metaphysical issues strictly tied to religion (in particular, the Jewish-Christian one) and, as a consequence of this fundamental constitution of western philosophy, non-metaphysical themes have been placed under the carpet for a long time, or, at best, have been investigated only accidentally, such as in the notion of plurality and that kind of evil that can happen to a community, when the last sky has no more God to invoke *more geometrico*. On the other hand, it seems to me that philosophy today is more interested in talking about its status and its incursion into the field of sciences, rather than in recovering its spiritual force

1. Hannah Arendt's letter to Karl Jaspers, March 4 1951, in *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, Lotte KOHLER and Jans SANER (eds.), trans. Robert and Rita KIMBER, Orlando FL, Harcourt Publ., 1993, p. 165.

and telling our society something. These words are not a polemic on some developments of contemporary philosophy – in particular, I am thinking of the so-called analytical tradition – rather, they are a simply an observation of the progressive decline of the philosophical and spiritual bite in the flesh of our society. If philosophy – using Jasper's words – is not the mere knowledge of formulae, theses and words but a thinking that deals with oneself,² this means that philosophy has something to do with our lives and with our deeds, not only in terms of our private life, but more in general in terms of public life and public thinking. In this regard, philosophy cannot be reduced to a multitasking competence that deals with the neurosis of massive publications, or with a story-telling deprived of a critical eye on society; rather, we should recall that what we call philosophy is the silent and constant dialogue that we have with ourselves and that is embedded in our actions – as human beings – and in our critical contribution to the development of society.

I am incline to say that the task of philosophy today is deeply connected with the issue of thinking and not simply with knowledge itself. It means that, for example, knowing what evil is doesn't prevent me from acting towards it. It is precisely in this crack between thinking and knowledge that we deal with meaning and truth and, in this respect, we deal with the *limit* of our thinking.

This paper is articulated in two parts: in the first one, I will show to which extent we can refer to evil as rooted in a metaphysical ground or, conversely, if it is a tendency inscribed into the human being's constitution. The notion of limit (*Grenze*) will illuminate this section. In the second part, I will consider the relationship between thinking, judging and acting and its implication in our age, demonstrating that this relationship has been compromised in the last 50 years by the increase of technicity: it is not simply necessary “to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly” – using Arendt's words in *The Life of the Mind*, rather it is necessary to recover our constitutional ‘obsolescence’ (as Günther Anders claimed) to stop (and to prevent) the transformation of the human being into a product – “We were born and not manufactured,” Anders always said.

II. Anthropological and ontological approaches

I would like to recall a passage from Arendt's letter to Jaspers dated March 4th, 1951, in which we read: “Evil has proved to be more radical than expected. In objective terms, modern crimes are not provided for in the Ten Commandments [...]. Yet we know that the greatest evils or radical evil have nothing to do anymore with such [...] sinful motives. What radical evil is I don't know, but it seems to me it somehow has to do with the following phenomenon: making

2. Karl JASPERs, *Philosophy*, vol. I, trans. Edward B. ASHTON, Chicago IL, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. 13.

human beings as human beings superfluous (not using them as means to an end, which leaves their essence as human untouched and impinges only on their human dignity; rather, making them superfluous as human beings).³ This letter is written some years before the work on Eichmann and shows Arendt's dedication to one of the topics she will investigate for the rest of her life: the issue of political thinking in the light of evil. However, in her critical meditation, the usage of "radical evil" has nothing to do with the original meaning in Kant: although Arendt here employs the same expression used by Kant in his work of 1793, she doesn't mean to stress the propensity to evil (*Hang zum Bösem*) that characterises human nature, rather she wants to remark on the absence of depth typical of evil, what in German is called *Nichtigkeit*. In her letter to Scholem she writes exactly this: "It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is 'thought-defying,' as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its 'banality.'"⁴ Arendt's usage of the adjective "radical" is not aimed to investigate the anthropological approach described by Kant; rather it is a personal attempt to describe evil in terms of its rootless and banality.

Jasper's comments on her exchange with Scholem go in this direction: even if in the letter dated October 22, 1963 he points out that she is "with Kant against Gnosis" in her use of the expression "radical evil", however a couple of months later, in the letter written on December 13th, Jaspers writes: "About the banality of evil: I think it's a wonderful inspiration and right on the mark as the book's subtitle. The point is that *this* evil, not evil *per se*, is banal [...] What evil is stands behind your phrase characterising Eichmann. And that question is indeed one we will probably never be quite to answer adequately."⁵ Jaspers thinks of the issue of evil *überhaupt*, not as a specific and historical phenomenon of evil, such as the Holocaust had been; rather the issue of evil *per se* remains something different from a particular and historical figure. There is something of truth in Jaspers' thinking: each historical aspect of evil, as far as it is only just one among many others, is not sufficient to describe and provide adequate elements for a general theory of evil, and a general theory of evil roots or in an anthropological approach or in a metaphysical/ontological one. However, at a certain point, we must face the historical dimension in which the

3. Hannah Arendt's letter to Karl Jaspers, March 4 1951, in *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, p. 166.

4. Hannah Arendt's letter to Gershom Scholem, July 24 1963, in *Hannah Arendt - Gershom Scholem: Correspondence 1939-1964*, trans. Anthony DAVID, Chicago IL, Chicago University Press, 2017, pp. 250-251.

5. Karl Jaspers' letter to Hannah Arendt, December 13, 1963, in *Hannah Arendt - Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, p. 542.

human being is embedded, and the socio-cultural consequences of this – and from this arises the question: is metaphysics still valid for our time? Can the long metaphysical tradition in which each of us has been educated, still provide an adequate explanation for the contemporary scenario? After the “death of God” – as Hegel and Nietzsche have shown – and after the “death of man” – using a common expression derived by Elie Wiesel and Edmond Jabés – what remains of metaphysics in its attempt to investigate the issue of evil?

Perhaps Jaspers' meditation can help us in answering these questions. In the first phase of his thinking, Jaspers sees in Kant a kind of passage between evil as *noumenon*, and the manifestation of its essence in terms of different phenomena. Jaspers, in other words, is still with Kant. His work entitled *Das radikal Böse bei Kant*, originating as a 1935 conference for the Lesezirkel Hottingen in Zürich, underscores a particular point of view on evil. In this conference, Jaspers employs the word *Umgreifende* that will be central in his following works. *Umgreifende* is translated in English as “the encompassing” and it determines the phenomenological gradations of thought and being, a transcendental concept intended to suggest the all-embracing transcendent reality within which human existence is enclosed. Jaspers is dealing with Kant's transcendental philosophy and with the clarification of reason in its possibilities and limits, a goal that will be fully reached in Volume II of his work entitled *Philosophy*. The act of thinking, in its constant impact into limits, is precisely this exercise of a groundless activity that tends to investigate the constitution of evil *per se*. It is properly this *Grenze*, this limit, that characterises the place of transcendence. Radical evil, as Kant thought, shows the limits of our moral attitude, writes Jaspers in this conference.

However, it will be in the 1961 work, entitled *Chiffren der Transzendenz* that Jaspers' meditation on evil shows a different development. Jaspers underlines two aspects of evil: an existential, concerned with human existence, one; and a metaphysical, concerned with the structure of the world, one. These two aspects are closely interconnected and are embedded into two realms: one is the evil springing from the horrors of nature (*Übel*) and that comes from the blind necessities of nature; the other is the evil resulting from human action (*Böse*) and that arises from conscious human decisions. These forms of evil are inextricably connected with the good and linked to the human being. Rejecting not only the ancient eudemonic tradition which proclaims the possibility of attaining absolute moral perfection, but also the view that evil can be overcome by way of progress or self-education in moral reason, Jaspers states: “Man can never realize himself truly and purely, never perfectly, never self-sufficiently.”⁶ This bond of good and evil constitutes the basic character-

6. Karl JASPERs, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung*, München, Piper, 1962, p. 317.

istic of Jaspers' understanding of the human's position in the world. The specific interrelationship between good and evil is well reflected in the statement that evil is the *ghostly doppelganger* (*der gespenstige Doppelgänger*). This denomination signifies that the good has logical precedence: firstly, evil needs the good as its prototype, which it distorts; secondly, the presence of the good provokes evil to distort it, as a doppelganger cannot precede its prototype. However, Jaspers maintains a sort of realistic pessimism when he claims that man's position in the world is characterised by a "hopeless misery" within the world⁷ and within the time – our earthly misery.

III. Technology and evil

It is impossible not to refer to Arendt's and Heidegger's thinking with this last sentence of Jaspers in our mind: our earthly misery of being in the world and within time. I am incline to consider Arendt's philosophy of evil – in terms of a progressive calculated technological extermination of human beings – adequate in showing how the metaphysical and ontological foundations of a general theory of evil are limited. If we go through her work on Eichmann and on her subsequent output, we find that the classical ontological conception of evil as *privatio boni* is totally inadequate and incomplete in observing the modern phenomenon of mass extermination, and neither is religion of any help in the understanding of this. In the concentration camps, as Heidegger observes, "hundreds of thousands die in masses. Do they die? They perish. They are put down. Do they die? They become pieces of inventory of a standing reserve for the fabrication of corpses. Do they die? They are unobtrusively liquidated in annihilation camps. And even apart from such as these – millions now in China abjectly end in starvation."⁸ It was precisely in the frame of these Bremen lectures (1949) that Heidegger referred publicly to the gas chambers in concentration camps. The context was the world becoming a disposable object, a picture, an idea for production, where both agriculture and deaths have the same fate. He writes: "Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs."⁹ In this context, Heidegger does not claim that the Holocaust is *identical* to modern agriculture, rather

7. Karl JASPERS, *Philosophy*, II, p. 250.

8. "Hunderttausende sterben in Massen. Sterben sie? Sie kommen um. Sie werden umgelegt. Sterben sie? Sie werden Bestandstücke eines Bestandes der Fabrikation von Leichen. Sterben sie? Sie werden in Vernichtungslagern unauffällig liquidiert. Und auch ohne Solches." (Martin HEIDEGGER, "Positionality," in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. Andrew J. MITCHELL, Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 53)

9. Martin HEIDEGGER, "Positionality," p. 27.

that they share the same ‘essence,’ that is the essence of technology (*Gestell*). In his speech entitled *The question concerning technology* he will say that “technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing,”⁹ that is the possibility of all productive manufacturing – human being included.

The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenge (*Herausfordern*), which puts onto nature the unreasonable demand that it supplies energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind’s blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. [...] Agriculture is now mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use.¹⁰

Those interpreters that have considered Heidegger’s words on gas chambers and agriculture as an equivalence of facts are quite irresponsible, since they tendentiously use Heidegger’s thoughts and remarks only to draw a portrait that fits with their narrative and that is not Heidegger’s thinking. Rather, I would submit, Heidegger is interested in how what is operative here is indicative of a manner of understanding and revealing the world, animals and indeed other human beings which we do not in fact control but rather are controlled by. In the famous interview with *Der Spiegel* Heidegger says: “Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them.”¹¹

It is precisely Heidegger that illuminates this pathway with a letter to Jaspers, dated April 8th, 1950. In this very important letter, in which Heidegger, privately with Jasper, clarifies his position during the Rectorate and soon after, we can read a sentence that reverberates as a warning: “But the affair of evil has not reached its end. It is only entering upon its world stage.”¹²

What kind of evil Heidegger is talking about?

Looking closely at his output of work between the end of the ‘40s and the end of his life, we can observe another turn (*Kehre*) in his meditation – one among many others. Heidegger is deeply committed to thinking and writing about

10. Martin HEIDEGGER, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William LOVITT, New York NY, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 13 and following.

11. Martin HEIDEGGER, “Only a God Can Save Us,” in Richard WOLIN (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy. A Critical Reader*, Cambridge MA – London, The MIT Press, 1998, pp. 105-106.

12. Heidegger’s letter to Jaspers, in Martin HEIDEGGER - Karl JASPER, *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence (1920-1963)*, Walter BIEMEL and Hans SANER (eds.), trans. Gary E. AYLESWORTH, Amherst NY, Humanity Press, 2003, p. 188.

the essence of technology, as a way of revealing being, through its oblivion, nihilism and *Gestell*. The essence of technology is connected to the *Machenschaft* (Machination), that occupies a large part of his reflection both in the *Contribution to Philosophy (of Knowing)* and in the *Black Notebooks*, whose issues need to be addressed from the point of view of metaphysics, and this occurs within the space of western technical rationality. Progress, technicity and machination are considered as particular features of modernity since they do not only conceal the unfolding ownmost of being, restricting the human being into the ‘darkest night.’ The being-historical thinking encounters modernity in all its nothingness. Precisely in *Überlegungen V* in *Black Notebooks* we read:

We proceed still in the era of progress – with the difference that, once and for a certain period, it was pursued as an international good, while today it is simply declared as a challenge among nations: “best” movies and “fastest” airplanes – the “safest” means; not resting on anything in order to be to its height – but holding everything immediately in one shot, and then? Stumbling in the big vacuum and screaming highest than others. Progress [...] becomes now a pincer more powerful that grips human being in its nothingness.¹³

In 1969, he writes:

No prophecy is necessary to recognize that the sciences now will soon be determined by the new fundamental science which is called cybernetics. This science corresponds to the determination of man as an acting social being. For it is the theory of the steering of the possible planning and arrangement of human labor. Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news. The arts become regulated-regulating instruments of information.¹⁴

It is not difficult to observe that the world in which Heidegger was embedded is not our world anymore – and with this I am not referring the background of the agricultural world of the Black Forest, but more in general to the broader technological, social, economic scenario of 40 years ago. Nevertheless, his reflections (*Überlegungen*) on the essence of technology have something to do with the issue of evil, and more precisely with our time. Heidegger’s critique of technology and machination does not ignore the progress through which humankind has developed, rather it softly insists on a kind of evil that is veiled by technology and machination. In the conference *The Danger* we can read:

13. “Wir bewegen uns immer noch im Zeitalter des Fortschritts – nur daß er eine Zeitlang als internationales Gut angestrebt wurde und heute als der Wettbewerb der Nationen ausgerufen wird: die «besten» Filme und die «schnellsten» Flugzeuge – die «sichersten» Mittel, nirgendwo mehr zu verweilen und auf etwas zuzuwachsen – sondern alles unversehens in einem zu besitzen und dann? in der großen Leere taumeln und sich überschreien. Der Fortschritt [...] wird jetzt zur noch schärferen Zange, die den Menschen in seine Leere einklemmt.” (*Überlegungen V*, p. 387)

14. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings*, David Farrell KRELL (ed.), San Francisco CA, Harper, 1993, p. 434.

Immeasurable suffering creeps and rages over the earth. The flood of suffering rises ever higher. But the essence of pain is concealed [...]. Everywhere we are besieged with countless and boundless suffering. We however are unpained, not brought into the ownership of the essence of pain. A grizzly abjection makes the rounds. The army of the poor grows and grows. But the essence of poverty is concealed. What takes place in poverty is that what is simple and ameliorating of everything essential, this inconspicuously becomes a propriety wherein the things enjoy dwelling in a granted world.¹⁵

“We are unpained” – Wir sind schmerzlos

Our attitude in recognizing pain and participating through empathy and interrogation is totally anaesthetised by media and by the almost absence of awareness of the knowledge of the consequences of such pain. As Babette Babich put it: “We are not pained and today there is more of this un-moved, painlessness than ever. Who bothers to watch animal rights videos, if one ever did, who is really concerned about the plight or fate (pick any word you like) of the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Nigerians, etc. and etc.? [...] We are unpained, we do not sense what is all around.”¹⁶ Perhaps, someone can recall Jonas’s words on the silence of creation: a silence provoked by the technical usage of nature and animals, reduced to products, to perishable goods. In his essay entitled *Philosophy at the end of the century* he describes the crisis he sees arising from “the threats we pose to the planet’s ecology” that forces us to look at one of the oldest philosophical questions: the relationship between the human being and nature. The impact of contemporary technology on the natural environment has been unprecedented and the development of experiments on animals and humans gives rise to questions of a moral nature.

The affair of evil is what remained open in Heidegger’s meditation¹⁷: with the foresight typical of his thought, Heidegger was able to see all the issues that characterised our age, as European and, more in general, as human beings. As pointed out by Zimmerman,

in speaking of the Holocaust in the same breath with the hydrogen bomb, Heidegger was making an important point. Mass extermination in the Nazi camps was possible only because of developments within industrial technology. Moreover, the Nazis spoke of the Jews as if they were little more than industrial ‘waste’ to be disposed of as efficiently as possible. Officials in charge of planning strategic use of nuclear weapons must be trained to conceive of the enemy populace in wholly abstract terms. Heidegger argued in several places that the hydrogen bomb – an

15. Martin HEIDEGGER, “Positionality,” p. 54.

16. Babette BABICH, “Constellating Technology: Heidegger’s *Die Gefahr/The Danger*,” in Babette BABICH and Dimitri GINEV (eds.), *The Multidimensionality of Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Contributions to Phenomenology 70*, Frankfurt am Main, Springer 2014, p. 178.

17. See Francisca BRENCIO, “Martin Heidegger ad the thinking of evil: from the original ethics to the Black Notebooks,” *Ius Fugit*, 19 (2016), pp. 87-134.

instrument of mass extermination – was not the real problem facing us. Instead, the problem is the perversion and constriction of humanity's understanding of being itself in the technological era. Extermination camps and hydrogen bombs, from Heidegger's viewpoint, were both symptoms of humanity's conception of itself and everything else as resources to be produced and consumed, created and destroyed, at will.¹⁸

“The performances of our heart – our inhibitions, fears, worries, regrets – are inversely proportional to the dimensions of our deeds” writes Günther Anders.¹⁹ In his short and provocative essay entitled *Reflections on the H Bomb*, he asks the reader to “imagine the bomb has been exploded” and has created a lifeless desert. According to Anders, the H-bomb exemplifies how the “technification” of our being makes notions of *human responsibility* or *individual responsibility* meaningless and obsolete. The bomb, for Anders, is not an exceptional device: it is regarded as an exemplary, destructive, technological object that allows a glimpse into the world that is produced by labour processes and modes of consumption that are so computerized and detached that the outcome of work is destined to remain ever “abstract.” Since no one is fully responsible for the existence of an atom bomb, or any other complex machine, and each single person makes only a partial contribution (to education, science, production, finance, maintenance, etc...), *nobody* can fully apprehend or even feel responsible for its effects. For Anders, the existence of the bomb is testament that we have been propelled into a sphere ‘*beyond morality and immorality*’ because “the division of labour prevents the [participant] so completely from having clear insight into the productive process, that the lack of conscience we must ascribe to him is no longer an individual moral deficiency.”²⁰

Is this the evil entered on the world stage in its final act? And if the answer is yes, what can philosophy do in this scenario?

IV. The task of philosophy

When I started to write this paper, in the back of my mind there was (and still is) one short work of Heidegger, entitled *The end of philosophy and the task of thinking*. I went through this essay yet again (after many hundreds) and I began to think about the end of philosophy in terms of metaphysics as Heidegger proposes. Philosophy is ending in the present age – wrote Heidegger 50 years ago – and its place is occupied by the sciences. Today we could add

18. Michael E. ZIMMERMAN, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity. Technology, Politics, Arts*, Bloomington-Indianapolis IN, Indiana University Press 1990, p. 43.

19. Günther ANDERS, “Reflections on the H Bomb,” *Dissent*, 3 (1956), p. 154.

20. Günther ANDERS, “Reflections,” p. 150. See also Christopher MÜLLER, “Desert Ethics: Technology and the Question of Evil in Günther Anders and Jacques Derrida,” *Parallax* 21 (2015), pp. 42-57.

that philosophy is perhaps alive in a very restrict space. I assume that the status in which some philosophical disciplines – such as phenomenology or hermeneutics – are held is quite well known: many of them are dead, and those which survive are at death's door. What seems to me dangerous is that it is not more required to enter into dialogue with philosophers but that it is simply required to collect some notions of their works and their thinking in order to pass exams, having one more paper published, having a conference accepted, or a research project funded. Nevertheless, I have in mind Foucault's metaphor for philosophy which is: Philosophy is a bag of tools and we should use these tools as the plumber does with the tools of his bag; when there is a problem, he knows which tool is required to solve that problem, just as a philosopher should know which tool is required to interpreter our time and its problems.

Among many of them, I would like to recall your attention on the following ones.

Firstly, people have become desensitised. To what? To sufferance (both of humans and not humans) to violence, to injustice, to immorality – and so on. With this expression, I am not referring merely to the ability that each of us, as individual, has lost in terms of empathy and recognition, but more specifically to a phenomenon that affects our community and our society. Perhaps it has been provoked by the increasing of technology – both in education and in communication – and by the massive role played by social media, but perhaps it is also a result of our inability to deal with all of this. There was a time when moral evil was condemned, and people took some action to stop it. The Civil Rights Movement is a good example. Today, people feel powerless. This desensitization is caused by a constant exposure to violence in the media, including TV, video games and movies. Some scholars suggest that violence may prime thoughts of hostility with the possibility of affecting the way we perceive others and interpret their actions, producing a number of aversive responses such as increased heart rate, fear, discomfort, perspiration and disgust. Clinical literature supports the theory that the increasing phenomenon of cyberbullies among young people could be a result of a constant exposure to violence. People are desensitised to humanitarian crisis. The recent and massive waves of refugees coming from war zones in Europe has provoked the reaction of exclusion and ostracism. The ideological dialectic between "we are....they are..." is still at work in Europe and it leads to an increase of nationalism and right-wing political movements. The mottos "keep refugees out" or "our land to our citizens" are still alive. Between 2015 and 2017 borders and walls seemed to burst onto the global agenda in the context of migration and halting spontaneous movement. Some European countries within the free-movement Schengen zone have reverted back to their enforcement of national borders. Some countries, like Hungary, have decided to build physical walls and those barriers have been the most dramatic than ever, after the WWII

and after Berlin's wall. Always in Hungary in the referendum held in 2015, 90% of voters chose to reject EU-mandated refugee resettlement quotas and to support the idea to close the borders. Refugees are still waiting in Greek islands, in Calais, at the borders of Italy in merciless condition but people do not feel empathy toward them, rather predominant feelings are anger and refusal.

Secondly, the increasing of nationalist movement and populism across the world. In rich countries nationalism is a cheap and easy way to generate enthusiasm for the state, and to deflect blame for what is wrong. The new nationalism owes a lot to cultural factors. Many Westerners liked their countries as they were and never asked for the immigration that turned Europe more Muslim and America less white and Protestant. Elite liberals stress two sources of identity: being a good global citizen and belonging to an identity group that has nothing to do with the nation. Communication tools have accelerated the spread of the new nationalism. Facebook and Twitter allow people to bypass the mainstream media's cosmopolitan filter to talk to each other, swap news, meet and organise rallies and in this massive communication more than often opinions are mixed with a real hate.

In this scenario, I could also mention the climate changes – that philosophically speaking is the total destruction of our *Lebenswelt*, in which our life and thinking are embedded – and many others.

In addressing the task of philosophy when faced with the issue of evil, we deal with many important questions that arise from the furrow of the metaphysical and ontological traditions. These traditions provide good "soil" for growth and development of the issue of evil, but they are not enough to uncover a meaning and an answer to this issue. In her *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt writes: "I have clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today. Such dismantling is possible only on the assumption that the thread of tradition is broken and that we shall not be able to renew it."²¹ I would like to underline this last sentence: *the thread of tradition is broken and we shall not be able to renew it*. This means that we are not required to renew these metaphysical pathways, rather, I would softly suggest, to let our philosophical tradition leaving its dark and dusty room to confront our reality and our deeds. I find necessary to relocate human being in the world, in its mortality, in its fragility and in its morality and immorality – and not behind as Günther Anders claims. I feel the urgency to reawaken a critical thinking that is not merely able to propose old questions about God, immortality and world.

21. Hannah ARENDT, *The Life of the Mind*, ed. by Mary McCARTHY, Orlando FL, Harcourt Publ., 1977, p. 212.

Perhaps, we could begin to take up the issue of *being educated in political thinking* and dealing with the contemporary vacuity of thought. “We all still need an education in thinking, and before that first a knowledge of what being educated and uneducated in thinking means”²², writes Heidegger: this need is our limit and at the same time the hope and challenge of our age.

*Oxford Research Center in the Humanities
University of Oxford, UK*

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to investigate the task of philosophy in our contemporary scenario. In doing so, this work is articulated in two parts: in the first one, I will show to which extent we can refer to evil as rooted in a metaphysical ground or, conversely, if it is a tendency inscribed into the human being's constitution. The notion of limit (*Grenze*) will illuminate this section. In the second part, I will consider the relationship between thinking, judging and acting and its implication in our age, demonstrating that this relationship has been compromised in the last 50 years by the increase of technicity: it is not simply necessary “to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly” (Arendt), rather it is necessary to recover our constitutional ‘obsolescence’ to stop (and to prevent) the transformation of the human being into a product.

SOMMAIRE

L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner la tâche de la philosophie en regard de notre époque. Cet examen s'articule en deux temps. Premièrement, j'explore la question de savoir si nous pouvons faire référence au mal comme enraciné dans un fondement métaphysique ou plutôt comme une tendance inscrite au cœur de la constitution humaine. La notion de «limite» (*Grenze*) fournit le fil conducteur de cette analyse. Dans un deuxième temps, j'examine les rapports entre penser, juger et agir ainsi que leurs implications pour notre époque. Je m'emploie à démontrer qu'en raison des développements techniques des cinquante dernières années, ces rapports ont été subvertis. Il n'est plus seulement nécessaire de différencier le vrai du faux ou le beau du laid (Arendt), mais il faut également recouvrer notre «obsolescence» constitutive afin de cesser (et de prévenir) la transformation de l'être humain en un produit.

22. Martin HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings*, p. 72.

LA VOLONTE DIABOLIQUE. Kant, Bizot et les Khmers rouges

JOËL MADORE

Ne jetez pas la pierre à la femme adultère... Je suis derrière.

Georges Brassens

De nombreux témoignages ont relaté les drames totalitaires qui ont cicatrisé le 20^e siècle, sinon pour panser les plaies, du moins pour penser le mal. Les auteurs ayant signé les plus bouleversants d'entre eux se sont engagés, au-delà de la description de l'événement, à sonder l'âme humaine dans ses profondeurs les plus sombres, au risque d'y voir un reflet de la leur. C'est le cas de François Bizot qui, dans *Le Portail*¹, nous raconte sa captivité dans un camp de prisonniers khmer rouge. En plus d'y dépeindre le sort du détenu, cet ouvrage se livre à une véritable enquête sur la nature de l'homme à partir de la figure de Douch. Si celui-ci fût le geôlier de Bizot qui, au péril de sa vie, parvint à convaincre la garde rapprochée de Pol Pot de le libérer, il deviendra également directeur du camp de concentration S-21, peut-être le plus notoire du régime khmer rouge où près de quarante mille captifs furent torturés et exécutés dans une brutalité inouïe.

Homme de principe à qui Bizot doit sa liberté d'un côté, assassin méthodique et sans scrupules de l'autre, Douch semble se rapprocher de l'humanité par son premier geste, mais s'en exclure par son crime. Or « l'humanité (n'est) une exclusivité pour personne, souligne Bizot. Un autre homme (est) toujours mon semblable, jusque dans l'abîme. » (SB, 68) Le regard qu'il porte sur le bourreau de Tuol-Sleng² finit donc par se retourner vers lui: il ne s'agit plus seulement de voir l'humain derrière le monstre, mais bien de reconnaître le monstre en soi-même. Comme il serait apaisant de savoir la communauté scindée entre des purs au-delà du vice et des mécréants incapables de vertu,

1. François BIZOT, *Le portail* (coll. « Folio »), préface de John LE CARRÉ, Paris, Éditions La table ronde, 2000 (dans la suite, abréviation « P » suivie de la pagination). Un témoignage tout aussi pénétrant, avec de précieuses informations sur le procès de Douch où Bizot est le seul témoin à comparaître, est également livré dans François BIZOT, *Le silence du bourreau* (coll. « Folio »), Paris, Gallimard, 2011 (dans la suite, abréviation « SB » suivie de la pagination).

2. À savoir, le camp de concentration S-21.

et plus encore de s'imaginer dans celle-là plutôt que dans celle-ci. Bizot chasse ces spectres du manichéisme et rappelle que la société humaine se construit dans la réciprocité, lorsque nous sommes solidaires à la fois du bien comme du mal.

Cette réflexion, lucide et difficile, rejette l'idée d'un mal hors d'atteinte, si défiguré par la haine et la colère qu'il en perde ses traits humains. Il n'y a pas de mal surnaturel, *diabolique*, qui aurait entièrement consommé l'individu au point de le rendre définitivement sourd à l'appel du bien. La condition humaine est marquée d'une angoisse morale constamment tirailée entre bienveillance et malveillance; si nous sommes sans cesse interpellés par l'une, nous restons à jamais tentés par l'autre. Cette proposition s'appliquerait-elle également aux pires criminels de l'histoire contemporaine? Oserait-on soutenir que non seulement Douch, mais Mao, Staline et Hitler, intraitables jusqu'au bout de leurs atrocités, ont porté en eux cette tension éthique? Au-delà de l'ambition carriériste, du réflexe égoïste et du plaisir sordide, ils embrasent le monde d'une violence d'un tout autre ordre. Sont-ils animés d'une volonté diabolique pour autant? La question est grave, car s'y jouent le drame totalitaire et celui de l'homme.

Nous aborderons cette problématique, dans un premier temps, en examinant les observations de Bizot esquissées à la fois dans *Le portail* et dans *Le silence du bourreau*. Nous proposons ensuite de donner un cadre philosophique, celui de la démonstration, à ce travail littéraire. À cet égard, nous suivrons l'itinéraire d'Emmanuel Kant, dont l'étude sur la volonté diabolique, essentiellement contenue dans ses quatre essais sur le mal radical rassemblés sous le titre de *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*³, recoupe de très près les conclusions de Bizot. Cette section portera un regard critique sur l'article de John Silber, «Kant at Auschwitz», qui remet en cause l'opposition de l'éthique kantienne au mal diabolique. Nous terminerons avec les conclusions de Kant et Bizot, rappelant que même le pire des criminels a volonté et visage humains. Il en va de son imputabilité comme de notre commune humanité.

Le visage du mal

Retour sur quelques éléments biographiques et historiques afin de replacer les propos de Bizot dans leur contexte. Ethnologue affecté à l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, il fut capturé le 10 octobre 1971 et condamné à mort par les Khmers rouges au début de leur offensive contre le gouvernement de Lon Nol, qui avait lui-même renversé le roi Sihanouk quatre ans auparavant. Mis

3. Emmanuel KANT, *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison* (Ak 6), introduit et traduit par Monique NAAR, Paris, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2004 (dans la suite, abréviation «Rlg» suivie des paginations allemande et de la traduction française).

aux fers dans le camp M-13, il y rencontre son jeune directeur, Douch, ancien professeur de mathématiques au lycée et militant communiste de la première heure. Bizot ne le sait pas encore, mais Douch sera le commandant de S-21 – ou Tuol Sleng –, le sinistre camp de concentration où périront près de quarante mille victimes. Douch croit Bizot innocent, fait très étonnant en soi puisque, comme plusieurs témoins de «l'univers concentrationnaire» l'avaient déjà remarqué, on arrivait habituellement à ces camps *déjà coupables*⁴. Plus exceptionnel encore, Douch s'active à convaincre les hauts dirigeants de le libérer, et ce, au péril de sa vie⁵. La requête remonte jusqu'à Pol Pot lui-même et, «contre toute attente», Bizot est relâché (SB, 60). Le 26 décembre 1971, au lendemain d'un repas de Noël partagé avec Douch, il retourne à Phnom-Penh où il y retrouve sa fille. Il ne s'enfuira du Cambodge qu'en 1975, suivant la prise de la capitale par les Khmers rouges, rejoignant de justesse un camp de réfugiés thaï et laissant derrière lui un pays qu'il avait étudié et aimé, mais désormais soumis à la violence arbitraire d'un régime totalitaire. Près du tiers de la population du Cambodge disparaîtra, victime d'un des génocides les plus meurtriers de l'histoire⁶, certains préférant plutôt parler d'un «ethnocide» – Bizot lui-même utilisera «altrucide» – tant les victimes étaient identiques à leurs bourreaux.

S'ensuivent deux décennies de silence que même une visite, en 1988, au musée du génocide khmer rouge mis sur pied par les Vietnamiens conquérants au cœur même de S-21, ne saura rompre. Bizot y fait pourtant une découverte fracassante: il prend soudainement conscience que Douch, celui à qui il doit la liberté et le bonheur d'avoir retrouvé son enfant, n'est nul autre que le bourreau de Tuol Sleng. Comme assommé par l'apparente incommensurabilité qui

4. Voir, entre autres ouvrages, David ROUSSET, *L'univers concentrationnaire* (coll. «Pluriel»), Paris, Fayard, 1998; Alexandre SOLJENITSYNE, *L'Archipel du Goulag* (en particulier le tome I), Paris, Fayard, 1991; Etty HILLESUM, *Une vie bouleversée* suivi de *Lettres de Westerbork*, Paris, Seuil, 1995. David CHANDLER, dans son excellent *S-21 ou le crime impuni des Khmers rouges* (coll. «Frontières»), Paris, Éditions Autrement, 2002, qui inclut une préface de François Bizot, note que le cas du camp khmer rouge ne fait pas exception à cette règle. Dans son magnifique et troublant témoignage, Rithy Pahn, réalisateur de documentaires sur le génocide khmer rouge auquel il survivra de justesse, rapporte ces propos de Douch sur Tuol Sleng: «À S-21, c'est la fin. Plus la peine de prier, ce sont déjà des cadavres.» Voir Rithy PAHN avec Christophe BATAILLE, *L'élimination*, Paris, Grasset, 2011, p. 42.

5. Dans ses «Mélanges de souvenirs à propos du Portail de François Bizot» publiés dans *Le silence du bourreau*, Douch soutient que son initiative lui avait valu une dénonciation d'un haut dirigeant du Parti, Ta Mok, et qu'il devait d'autant plus se méfier qu'il avait «du sang chinois». Son interlocuteur, soit dit en passant, ajoutera que le Parti n'avait confiance qu'en un seul Chinois: Ta Hong (Ngèt You), que tous connaissaient depuis longtemps. Hong sera incarcéré à S-21 le 13 mars 1978 (SB, 193). Concernant la menace à l'égard de Douch, voir aussi ce qu'en dit Bizot lui-même dans *Le portail*, p. 140: «Mes accusateurs n'auraient pas manqué d'exploiter contre lui son erreur de jugement [...]. Je réalisai tout à coup le risque énorme qu'il avait pris en parlant sur mon innocence.»

6. Bizot et Chandler parlent de vingt mille charniers dans le pays pour un nombre qui excède les deux millions de morts: *S-21 ou le crime impuni des Khmers rouges*, p. 8.

sépare le geste courageux du crime abominable, Bizot ne prendra la plume qu'une dizaine d'années plus tard, lorsque Douch est retrouvé et démasqué par deux journalistes en 1999. Il ne lui était plus permis de se taire, confierait-il (SB, 33), et *Le portail* sera publié l'année suivante. Le titre évoque bien sûr l'enceinte séparant l'ambassade française des rues de Phnom-Penh envahies par les milices khmères rouges. Mais il n'est pas sans nous rappeler, également, Hécate, déesse grecque des portes de l'enfer, marquant le seuil entre la vie et la mort, et que Shakespeare fera reine des sorcières dans *Macbeth*, tragédie plongée dans l'*équivoque* du mal. Toujours est-il qu'il avoue écrire l'ouvrage dans «une amertume sans fond» (P, 27). Sans doute, d'une part, parce que le travail d'écriture le force à ressasser le pénible souvenir de l'humiliation carcériale⁷ et de la terreur quotidienne d'y perdre la vie, cauchemar depuis longtemps enfoui. Peut-être aussi, cela dit, parce que cette excavation révèle la «dualité» de son geôlier – l'horreur jamais loin du beau – dont il se sait lui-même si près.

D'un côté, Douch est présenté sous un visage humain. Tant avec les gardes que les prisonniers, écrit Bizot, il éprouvait un besoin de plaisanter, «la plus distincte, mais aussi la plus tragique qui soit, des preuves de son humanité» (SB, 165). Plus marquant encore, cependant, est sa rigueur éthique. Douch se met entièrement au service de la cause communiste visant l'émancipation d'un peuple étouffé depuis trop longtemps par la misère et l'oppression. Inébranlable dans sa conviction, intransigeant dans l'application de ses principes, Douch ne connaissait pas la duplicité (P, 132). De fait, s'il s'était décidé à faire libérer Bizot, ce n'était pas seulement par sympathie pour lui, mais bien davantage par «une recherche passionnée de droiture morale qui ressemblait à une quête de l'absolu. Douch faisait partie de ces purs, de ces fervents idéalistes, désireux avant tout de vérité» (P, 140). Le bourreau, donc, dévoué à la vérité mais trompé par elle, sinon par le Parti; lui et tant d'autres au service du noble pour finir dans l'opprobre. «Je ne savais pas qu'orchestrer le mal pouvait n'exclure ni la sincérité ni la générosité», conclut Bizot (SB, 87).

Le crime de Douch serait-il celui de s'être laissé berner trop facilement par une foi aveugle dans les principes de l'idéologie, ce à quoi semble plus vulnérable le communisme, ne portant pas l'odieux de la prémissse nazie mais bercé, plutôt, par la promesse universelle et utopique de la rénovation sociale? Aurait-il péché par orgueil, refusant de se remettre en question tant dans ses convictions que dans leur application? «Qu'aurais-je pensé, si l'on m'avait confié une arme et promis la révolution du peuple, qui conduit à l'égalité, à la fraternité, à la justice? J'aurais été heureux comme on l'est quand on croit», déclare Rithy Pahn, pourtant lui-même victime de la barbarie khmère rouge⁸.

7. «Le cliquetis permanent, la meurtrissure des os, l'immobilisation n'étaient rien: le pire était la honte. [...] L'humiliation était insupportable.» (P, 121)

8. Rithy PAHN, *L'élimination*, p. 42.

Toujours est-il que si la générosité n'exclut pas le mal, l'inverse est également vrai: la terreur n'écarte pas la droiture. Bien au contraire, c'est peut-être cette même rigueur sans compromis – presque mathématique – qui fit de Douch un tortionnaire d'autant plus redoutable. Ce visage de violence calculée est également le sien. Dès lors que la fin apparaît incontestable, tous les moyens lui deviennent justifiés: « Torturer, pour lui, cela faisait partie d'un ensemble. Ce n'était rien d'autre que mettre l'ardeur de son engagement en pratique, moyennant l'adéquation de l'acte avec la grandeur de l'intention révolutionnaire. La victoire contre l'impérialisme était à ce prix. Il m'a fait comprendre cela en peu de mots [...] sans nier [...] l'horreur d'une besogne qu'il ne pouvait accomplir qu'en se mettant 'hors d'haleine', au sens propre⁹. » (SB, 66) Douch, méthodique et inexorable dans l'exercice d'un devoir qui devient chiffré, à savoir, sans cesse à la recherche d'une mesure recensée capable de confirmer ou d'infirmer son efficacité. Répondant à la question d'un juge durant son procès, l'accusé y va de cette précision: « Je maintiens que les aveux ainsi obtenus ne reflétaient pas la vérité. Au maximum, peut-être seulement vingt pour cent. Et pour ce qui est des personnes dont le nom était livré, au maximum dix pour cent¹⁰. » (SB, 240) C'est peut-être dans cette froide exactitude comptable que se révèle la dimension la plus glaçante de sa cruauté.

Or si Bizot écrit dans une « amertume sans fond », osons-nous suggérer, ce n'est pas seulement pour avoir identifié l'écart qui sépare en Douch le don de son crime, mais aussi pour voir cet abîme s'ouvrir en lui-même¹¹. Au moins trois exemples semblent le confirmer. À M-13, terrorisé et condamné à mort, il choisit de s'enfuir. Cependant, raconte-t-il, « dès lors que j'avais décidé de m'échapper, je ne pouvais envisager de croiser quelqu'un – fût-ce un enfant – sans le tuer, et prendre le risque de le laisser filer pour donner l'alerte. » (P, 124-125) Les premières pages du *Silence du bourreau*, autobiographiques, brossent un tableau plus sombre encore. Elles s'amorcent avec l'histoire de Sarah, fennec adopté par Bizot lors de son service militaire. Il lui était attaché au point de l'avoir humanisé, confie-t-il, même que ses habitudes lui étaient encore plus familières que celles de ses compagnons d'armes. Or Bizot, épris

9. Dans sa déposition pour le procès, Bizot déclare: « Je crois néanmoins me souvenir que Douch a exprimé que ce travail, il le faisait sans plaisir, comme une obligation, parce que les prisonniers ne diraient pas la vérité d'eux-mêmes. » (SB, 245) Cette citation n'est pas sans rappeler ce que rapporte Arendt à propos de l'indifférence bureaucratique, quoique acharnée, d'Eichmann: « To evacuate and deport Jews had become routine business; what stuck in his mind was bowling, being the guest of a Minister, and hearing of the attack on Heydrich. » [Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York NY, Penguin Books, 1992 (1963), p. 82]

10. « Dans cette société parfaitement totalitaire, le chiffre emporte tout », observe Pahn (*L'élimination*, p. 180).

11. Ce que Bizot lui-même semble confirmer: « (...) c'est précisément cette partie commune de l'être sensible – celle que je partage avec (les despotes sanguinaires) car elle ouvre aussi sur le fond de moi-même –, qui est cause de toute ma détresse, de mon désarroi. » (SB, 36)

d'aventures, souhaite depuis longtemps quitter la France, sous l'impulsion d'une «exigence naturelle» et «prêt à tout», insiste-t-il (SB, 17). Sa mère ne veut pas de l'animal et voilà qu'il se dresse en travers de son ambition. Bizot pris le fennec et le cogna «à toute volée contre le parapet», la bête choyée sacrifiée au nom du rêve de jeunesse, dans le silence de la mère et l'indignité du fils: «Je ressortis foudroyé d'une expérience qui m'avait fait tomber sur l'effroyable secret, celui que ma mère, comme tout le monde, avait pris l'habitude de garder: ce qui distinguait l'homme des autres, c'était son aptitude naturelle à faire fi de ses émotions.» (SB, 27)

Le Portail dépeint un troisième exemple, tout aussi troublant, de ce clair-obscur moral. Un jour, raconte Bizot, un nouveau prisonnier arriva à M-13 avec sa fille de neuf ans. Sa présence dans un monde de cruauté adulte révolta Bizot. L'enfant, immédiatement séparée de son père et isolée dans une baraque où elle restait recroquevillée sans parler, rappelait le souvenir douloureux de sa propre fille, Hélène. Pendant plusieurs pages, il raconte comment il l'amena à finalement se sustenter un peu de lait chaud, offert à partir de sa propre ration. Peu à peu, l'enfant reprit vie, bondissant, griffonnant par terre et tournant sur elle-même autour de Bizot: «Lorsque je la sentais ainsi à mon côté, une vigueur nouvelle me venait, comme si la flamme de vie qui brûlait à nouveau dans son petit corps avait diffusé un jour neuf», se réjouit-il. Sous invitation, elle se mit à participer à «l'autocritique» quotidienne tenue par la milice, en réalité séances d'autodafés quasi-religieuses où l'on confessait à tour de rôle ses manquements au credo révolutionnaire. Au crépuscule, suivant le passage du garde qui cadenassa la chaîne autour du pied de Bizot, la petite le rejoint, comme elle aimait à le faire à ce moment de la journée.

Je la vis s'approcher, de son vol de papillon, le *krama* ondulant dans le blanc clair d'un morceau de ciel. Elle s'accroupit, et sa main alla chercher ma jambe repliée. Son doigt léger, l'index – dont je me rappelle l'ongle transparent et fragile –, se glissa aisément sous les maillons de fer, qu'elle souleva pour en mesurer avec gravité la tension. Le passage de ce doigt sur le derme meurtri m'avait fait du bien. Touché par sa sollicitude, je m'étais empressé de minimiser la douleur du fer sur les chevilles, en hochant la tête en signe de dénégation, avec un sourire rassurant. Elle repartit en sautillant et revint, un trousseau de clefs à la main. Je la regardai sans comprendre. Elle ouvrit le cadenas et, non sans mal, resserra la chaîne avec application. (P, 138)

Le mal n'exclut ni la droiture, on l'a déjà souligné, ni même la beauté ou l'innocence. Et «à mesure que l'on observe sans feindre la monstruosité des autres, on finit tôt ou tard par la reconnaître en soi», admet Bizot (SB, 36). C'est peut-être là le plus saisissant de son témoignage. Il ne s'agit pas d'un acte de contrition par mortification, mais d'un aveu: le mal que nous voyons en l'autre sommeille toujours en nous. «Chacun de nous est coupable devant tous, pour tous et pour tout, et moi plus que les autres», fera dire Dostoïevski à l'un

des personnages des *Frères Karamazov*. Douch, apôtre inflexible du communisme, a vu l'humain derrière le supposé traître capitaliste à la solde du CIA. « Mon visage devenu le sien fut ce qui lui a interdit de me tuer », avouera Bizot, désormais appelé à voir à son tour l'homme derrière le monstre et le monstre en lui-même (SB, 80)¹².

Les 8 et 9 avril 2009, Douch comparaît devant les Chambres extraordinaires au sein des Tribunaux cambodgiens (CETC), à Phnom-Penh. Bizot est convoqué comme unique témoin, forcé de reconnaître l'humanité de Douch devant la famille des disparus, victimes d'un bourreau qui lui avait cependant fait voir « autre chose de lui-même » (SB, 33). Il s'engage alors « dans la plus périlleuse de toutes les équations: deviner en (soi) le pire de ce qu'il y a en l'autre » (SB, 38). Citons un extrait de sa déposition :

Douch a marqué mon destin: C'est que je dois désormais m'arranger comme je peux avec une donnée double, dont les deux aspects se contredisent atrocement en moi: d'une part un homme qui a été le porteur, le bras armé, d'une tuerie étatisée, et gros de tant d'horreurs commises que je ne peux pas imaginer me mettre aujourd'hui à sa place; d'autre part celle d'un jeune homme dans lequel j'avoue que j'ai peur de pouvoir me reconnaître, qui a engagé son existence et son cœur en faveur de la révolution, pour un but dont la grandeur cautionnait dès lors l'idée que le crime n'était pas seulement légitime mais qu'il était méritoire; comme dans toutes les guerres. (SB, 233)

Il faut le reconnaître, ce passage n'est pas sans prêter à controverse, notamment parce qu'il avance que Douch a commis le mal par souci du bien; sa cruauté n'a pas été attisée par une volonté entièrement consommée par le mal, mais par l'ambition sans doute sincère d'affranchir les Cambodgiens du joug de l'oppression. Cette position contentieuse suppose elle-même deux autres hypothèses tout aussi risquées: premièrement, on ne choisit pas le mal pour le mal, mais *au nom d'un bien* que l'on poursuit (fût-il illusoire et trompeur); et deuxièmement, l'homme n'est jamais *entièrement* mauvais: on peut certes étouffer la voix de la conscience, mais on ne peut pas complètement la réduire au silence. Ensemble, ces deux propositions rejettent la possibilité d'une volonté diabolique. En tant que telle, cette thèse reste au stade de l'opinion éclairée. Afin d'en faire une démonstration philosophique, tournons-nous vers la théorie morale de Kant.

12. À noter que cette citation et celle qui précède se retrouvent toutes deux dans l'œuvre d'Emmanuel Levinas. Les rapprochements potentiels entre les deux auteurs mériteraient une étude attentive.

Kant contre la volonté diabolique

À première vue, le choix de Kant pour résoudre cette énigme peut paraître douteux¹³. Après tout, celui-ci a été accusé d'avoir été incapable de formuler une philosophie de la résistance, ouvrant la voie à la complicité criminelle si répandue dans les régimes totalitaires, celle qui a gardé silence devant l'horreur, celle qui s'est tue devant le meurtre, celle qui a obéi à Staline, Hitler et Mussolini aveuglément. C'est le verdict de John Silber, prononcé dans un article resté célèbre, quoique au titre fort douteux: «Kant at Auschwitz»¹⁴. Puisqu'il identifie le mal à une faiblesse de la volonté, Kant ne peut pas rendre compte d'un individu aussi diabolique que Hitler, ni d'un régime aussi volontairement cruel que le Troisième Reich. L'amour-propre, dans son expression carriériste, d'individus semblables à Eichmann ont certainement contribué à l'efficacité industrielle du crime nazi, mais ces personnalités faiblardes n'ont pu entraîner à elles seules la ruine morale de l'Europe¹⁵. À cet égard, il faut plutôt des volontés puissantes «possédées d'une idéologie satanique»¹⁶, seules capables de pousser les autres à l'horreur. Or la pensée de Kant est incapable de concevoir de la possibilité du démoniaque – le rejet libre et délibéré de la raison par la raison¹⁷. Son éthique ne laisse pas entrevoir qu'un agent puisse commettre le mal au nom du mal, alors que le nazisme nous présente un type nouveau de méchanceté: le mal devenu fin en soi. La fureur de ce mal ne peut être évoquée, toujours selon Silber, que par une description littéraire ou romanesque du diabolique, par exemple: le Satan du *Paradise Lost* de Milton. Il convient de le citer longuement:

The Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (...) exemplifies the transcendent sort of devilishness Kant rejects as a romantic illusion of the heroic grandeur of wickedness. But Milton, in presenting Satan in his solitary defiant rage, consumed by hatred of everything God-like save God-like power, presents a compelling example of the genuinely demonic. This is the evil we confront in Auschwitz – evil that far transcends the conceptual limits of Kant's theory. In Auschwitz we confront not the wickedness that results from impotence but the demonic evil of a powerful though irrational exercise of freedom¹⁸.

L'argument général nous paraît reposer sur trois prémisses: (I) Hitler désire le mal en tant que fin (c'est l'objet de sa volonté); (II) sa force de caractère lui

13. Une partie de ce qui suit est tiré de notre ouvrage sur Kant et le mal radical: *Difficult Freedom and Radical Evil in Kant: Deceiving Reason* (chapitre V, section 3.3), Londres, Bloomsbury, 2011.

14. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», in Gerhard FUNKE et Thomas M. SEEBOHM (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Kant Congress*, vol. 1, Washington DC, University Press of America, 1991, p. 177-211.

15. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», p. 201.

16. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», p. 178.

17. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», p. 194 (voir également p. 198).

18. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», p. 200.

permet de poursuivre et de réaliser cette fin ; (III) ce faisant, il nous présente un cas de volonté diabolique qui rejette, *définitivement*, la liberté, se retrouvant ainsi complètement dominé par le mal et basculant, par le fait même, de l'autonomie vers l'hétéronomie. Reprenons-les un à un afin de les examiner plus en détails.

(I) *Le mal au nom du mal.* À n'en pas douter, le nazisme et ses camps de la mort nous présente une politique d'extermination singulière. Le meurtre du peuple juif n'était pas subordonné à des objectifs d'ordre martial et s'est même posé, aux yeux de certains commentateurs, en obstacle à la conduite de la guerre. Il serait donc bien tentant d'y voir une quête destructrice se nourrissant de sa propre faim, à savoir, un mal qui ne serait pas dérivé d'un bien, fût-il égoïste. Ce serait diminuer la portée idéologique derrière la violence nazie. De nombreuses théories ont cherché à légitimer le mouvement national-socialiste : racialisme, Darwinisme social, eugénisme et anthropologie physique, toutes ont voulu faire miroiter à leur façon la promesse utopique d'une population purifiée de ses éléments « indigents ». Effroyable et impitoyable, le *Judenmord* ne s'est pas moins revêtu du sarrau de la (pseudo-)science afin de masquer l'odieux de son meurtre. L'imposture aura donc servi à présenter le crime comme étant nécessaire à la résurgence morale et culturelle d'un continent convaincu de sa décadence depuis plusieurs décennies déjà. La dimension séductrice de l'idéologie, en tant que promesse temporelle de salut, ne saurait être diminuée¹⁹. La puissance d'attraction du mal réside dans sa capacité à se faire passer pour un bien, invitation aguichante ne laissant pas deviner ses conséquences désastreuses.

(II) *La force de caractère.* Un sujet aussi « faible » que Eichmann aurait-il pu avoir été l'auteur de la Solution finale, tant dans son intention que dans son exécution ? Certes, il est bassement carriériste, mais est-il si tordu par le mal qu'il n'éprouve plus aucun remords ni même une quelconque attirance envers le bien²⁰ ? Eichmann est le prototype du sujet kantien corrompu, soutient Silber : somme toute, il ne fait que subordonner son devoir à ses intérêts personnels par manque de courage moral²¹. Hitler, au contraire, est « l'antithèse »

19. Il serait sans doute pertinent de rappeler à Silber, concernant sa référence au Satan de *Paradise Lost*, que la lutte de ce dernier contre les forces célestes n'est pas animée par une « idéologie satanique », mais bien par cette faute si commune aux mortels : l'orgueil. Lire MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, Livre IV ; 35-40 : « Who first seduced them to that foul revolt ? The infernal Serpent ; he it was, whose guile stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived the mother of mankind, what time his pride had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring to set himself in glory above his peers, he trusted to have equalled the Most High. »

20. Cette interrogation fait référence à une note de l'Introduction à la *Doctrine de la vertu* où Kant déclare qu'il « n'y a pas, en effet, d'homme si dégradé qui en violant (la loi intérieure), ne sente en soi une résistance, et n'éprouve pour lui-même un sentiment de mépris qui le force à se faire violence. » (*Métaphysique des mœurs*, 'Introduction à la Doctrine de la vertu', Ak 6, 380n ; cité dans John Silber, "Kant at Auschwitz", p. 195)

21. John SILBER, « Kant at Auschwitz », p. 198.

même de ce modèle, adoptant sciemment la maxime d'action visant la destruction du peuple juif. Lui seul, donc, possède la force de caractère nécessaire pour mettre l'Europe à feu et à sang²². C'est ce choix délibéré et sans réserve du mal au nom du mal que la philosophie de Kant est incapable d'admettre²³.

Une telle interprétation du mal radical, comme étant le choix conscient de faire passer ses désirs avant son devoir, semble un peu courte. En se concentrant seulement sur les deux premiers degrés du penchant au mal chez Kant, la faiblesse et l'impureté, Silber néglige le troisième, qui est pourtant le plus important : la méchanceté ou la corruption du cœur humain (Rlg, 31, 97). Plus précisément, il ne remarque pas le mécanisme par lequel le sujet choisit la faute : le mensonge à soi. Ce n'est pas la faiblesse et l'impureté du cœur qui expliquent que le mal soit universel, inextirpable et radical chez Kant, mais sa *perversité*, à savoir, l'effort délibéré de se tromper soi-même. Voilà ce qui contamine l'intention morale *à sa racine*. Ainsi, tout comme être moral requiert un effort inlassable afin de s'élever au-delà de ses passions, le mal exige également un travail soutenu mais visant, bien sûr, l'intention contraire : étouffer le germe du bien en soi plutôt que de le cultiver, ou plus exactement, se convaincre de la vertu de son vice. Il n'y a donc ni impuissance, ni paresse, mais un engagement incessant à promouvoir l'un et l'autre, c'est-à-dire à nourrir l'illusion d'une vie enfin débarrassée de l'angoisse profonde liée à l'exercice, imputable, de notre liberté²⁴. Pour le dire autrement, Silber court le risque de banaliser toute l'industrie du mensonge derrière le mal commis par Eichmann et d'héroïser, par le fait même, celui de Hitler.

(III) *La volonté diabolique*. À vrai dire, rien de ce qui précède ne remet en cause le cœur de l'argument de Silber, qui ne consiste pas tant à savoir si l'agent peut refuser l'appel du devoir, mais bien si ce refus peut être définitif. Autrement dit, la raison peut-elle renoncer à elle-même ? Comme le demande Silber, l'irrationnel peut-il devenir un mode de rationalité et donc l'une des expressions possibles de liberté en tant que spontanéité²⁵ ? Pour répondre à cette question, il nous faut comprendre plus clairement ce que Kant entend par volonté diabolique, définition qui reste imprécise dans le texte de Silber. Nous lisons :

Donc, pour donner un fondement du mal moral dans l'homme, la *sensibilité* contient trop peu; car, en ôtant les motifs qui peuvent naître de la liberté, elle rend l'homme purement animal; mais en revanche une raison qui libère de la loi morale, maligne en quelque sorte (une volonté absolument mauvaise) contient trop au

22. *Ibid.*

23. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», p. 195.

24. Voir à cet égard les très belles réflexions de Kant sur les premiers usages angoissants de notre liberté nous plaçant devant «l'abîme» (*Abgrund*), dans ses *Conjectures sur le commencement de l'histoire humaine* (Ak 8, 110-114).

25. John SILBER, «Kant at Auschwitz», p. 200.

contraire, parce que par là l'opposition à la loi serait même élevée au rang de motif (car sans un motif l'arbitre ne peut être déterminé) et le sujet deviendrait ainsi un être *diabolique*. Aucun de ces deux cas ne s'applique à l'homme. (Rlg, 35, 103)

Que devons-nous comprendre de ce passage? Que la volonté diabolique ne peut pas choisir le mal en tant que fin *car elle ne peut pas choisir*. À la fois l'animal et l'être diabolique – voire même un être divin – partagent le même trait: ils sont tous deux dispensés du conflit moral; il ne saurait y avoir de tensions éthiques ni chez l'un, ni chez l'autre. Il n'y a pas de choix possible, dans les deux cas, parce que l'alternative – en l'absence d'options – est impossible. Le diable n'est pas plus tenté par le bien que Dieu ne le serait par le mal. La condition humaine, au contraire, est par nature sous l'emprise d'une tension éthique. De la même façon qu'il ne nous est pas permis de nous séparer parfaitement de nos inclinations empiriques, nous sommes tout aussi incapables de totalement étouffer l'appel de la loi intérieure; nous restons constamment hantés par l'un, habités par l'autre. L'humain, par conséquent, n'est ni parfaitement bon, ni désespérément mauvais: sommé par son devoir, il reste tenté par ses désirs. Même le plus méchant d'entre tous ne peut répudier la loi morale, soutient Kant, puisque celle-ci «s'impose d'une manière irrésistible en vertu de la disposition morale» (Rlg, 36, 103-4). À ses yeux, il est «*impossible*» pour la raison législatrice morale «d'extirper en elle l'autorité de la loi même et nier l'obligation qui en dérive» (Rlg, 35, 103). Par conséquent, la volonté diabolique ne signifie pas faire le mal intentionnellement, en s'en délectant ou avec fureur; ce n'est pas une question d'intensité dans le geste, mais de portée: l'intention par laquelle je choisis la faute est-elle liberticide? Car il faut bien comprendre que la volonté diabolique ne fait pas qu'ignorer les lumières de la conscience pour Kant; elle les éteint à jamais, impossibilité inscrite dans l'être même de l'homme, condamné par sa nature phénoménale et nouménale à une vie d'inquiétudes morales. Or la question de Silber est de savoir si l'on retrouve une telle tension éthique chez un individu tel que Hitler. A-t-il été troublé par son crime? A-t-il hésité devant le mal? Suivant l'ignominie et la monstruosité du meurtre nazi, le nier semble obscène. Et pourtant, il faut se ranger du côté de Kant et Bizot, et ce, pour au moins quatre raisons.

D'abord, si Silber a raison de dire qu'une volonté diabolique choisit le mal au nom du mal ou comme fin en soi, comment dès lors parler d'une force de caractère? Si Hitler est vraiment démoniaque, alors tout comme le Satan de Milton, il ne choisit pas le mal, cette décision allant de soi. Comment, à ce moment, parler de force lorsqu'il n'y aucune résistance? À plusieurs reprises au fil de son œuvre, Kant cite le poème de Haller qui vante le mérite de l'homme plutôt que celui des anges²⁶. Comment en auraient-ils, eux qui flottent

26. «Le monde avec ses défauts, vaut mieux qu'un royaume d'anges sans volonté.» Cité dans Rlg, 65n, 139n. Ce vers de Haller est également cité à la page 83n, ainsi que dans la

au-dessus des plaisirs sensibles comme de la tentation, alors que l'être humain doit rester droit dans l'adversité ? L'idée d'une volonté diabolique nous rapproche dangereusement d'un implacable déterminisme : l'animal suit forcément son instinct, Dieu est par définition au-delà du motif sensible et le possédé rejette nécessairement la loi morale. Si ce dernier a une volonté, elle reste entièrement libre de toute tension, semblable à un automate à la conduite parfaitement prévisible. Il ne peut y avoir de force (de caractère) là où il n'y a aucune résistance.

D'autre part, n'est-il pas contradictoire de prétendre que la raison peut renoncer à elle-même ? L'acte par lequel je rejette la loi morale ne suppose-t-il pas d'abord celui de la reconnaître par la raison ? Certes, l'aliénation existe et par le biais de sa distinction entre *Wille* et *Willkür*, Kant admet que le choix du mal a un impact déterminant sur ma constitution, mais il n'est pas définitif. Dans le choix de renoncer au devoir par le mensonge à soi, la liberté se dissimule et se découvre tout à la fois : elle se dissimule sous l'effet d'une hypocrisie qui brouille l'intégrité de l'intention initiale, mais elle se découvre aussi parce que cela reste une décision. La liberté ne peut pas choisir de ne plus choisir.

Par ailleurs, l'idée d'une volonté diabolique vient à un coût trop cher payé, celui de l'imputabilité. Quelle responsabilité pour Hitler ou pour Douch s'ils sont l'un et l'autre diaboliques ? Supposons qu'ils puissent renoncer de façon permanente à leur raison pratique. Que peut-on leur imputer par la suite ? Une fois sous le joug de l'irrationnel, une fois sous le contrôle d'une « idéologie satanique », pour employer l'expression de Silber, le sujet reste-t-il responsable de ses actes ? Pourrons-nous, dès lors, l'accuser de désobéir à un commandement qu'il n'entend pas ? La folie n'est pas un crime, et ce n'est que dans la mesure où nous sommes libres que nous sommes responsables. Ne laissons pas les pires criminels du siècle passé s'en tirer aussi facilement.

Finalement, force est d'admettre qu'il y a quelque chose de discutable dans les formules employées par Silber pour décrire le crime nazi. « Idéologie satanique » et « authentiquement (*genuinely*) démoniaque », « êtres diaboliques » planant « au-delà de l'expérience humaine » ou un « diabolique de type transcendant », etc., tous ces termes finissent par chasser Auschwitz hors du monde des hommes. Certes, la tentation est grande devant l'effroyable cruauté des camps de la mort nazis d'y voir un crime si monstrueux qu'il ne ressemble à rien d'humain. On l'assigne alors – par peur de s'y reconnaître ? – à l'inhumain, voire même, suivant Silber, au *surhumain*, comme si notre liberté fragile ne pouvait porter le poids de l'odieux et de l'infâme. Il n'y a pourtant pas de « grandeur satanique », prévenait Hannah Arendt, et il faut éviter de « mythologiser

Métaphysique des mœurs (Ak 6, 397n; 158n) et dans les *Leçons sur la théorie philosophique de la religion* (Ak 19, 116).

l'horreur »²⁷. Décrivant le héros de son roman *Le saut du varan*, Bizot écrit: « Aussi condamnait-il la naïveté qui conduisait l'humanité à faire d'Hitler, aujourd'hui, le diable par excellence, l'inhumain fait homme, et avec lui les grands criminels de l'Histoire. Il pensait, au contraire, que nous ne sortirions de l'enfance que le jour où, sans vouloir masquer l'abomination, nous aurions le courage de réhabiliter l'homme en eux, de les humaniser de plein droit, afin d'ouvrir les yeux²⁸. » Le crime nazi porte la marque de l'homme, celle de son libre arbitre qui a choisi la faute mais qui aurait pu *choisir autrement*. Car si la liberté nous déclare coupables, elle annonce également l'espoir.

Conclusion

Les figures du mal ont visage humain. La formule ne vise pas à expier le bourreau en normalisant son crime. « Essayer de comprendre, soutient Bizot, ce n'est pas vouloir pardonner. Il n'y a me semble-t-il aucun pardon possible. » (SB, 252) Bien au contraire, refuser de diaboliser l'assassin, c'est refuser de le délier de sa responsabilité, de le disculper. C'est également rendre son meurtre plus terrifiant encore: l'un des *nôtres* a commis la faute, et c'est cette proximité qui effraie. « Je crains malheureusement qu'on ait une compréhension plus effrayante du bourreau, quand on prend sa mesure humaine », répond Bizot à l'un des avocats du CETC (SB, 252). « Ah! si tout était si simple! Si seulement il y avait de mauvaises personnes qui commettaient de mauvaises actions quelque part, et qu'il fût simplement nécessaire de les séparer de nous et de les détruire. Mais la ligne de partage entre le bien et le mal coupe à travers le cœur de chaque être humain. Et qui souhaite détruire une partie de son propre cœur? », demande Soljenitsyne dans *L'Archipel du Goulag*. L'impératif d'Auschwitz, celui qui nous commande de comprendre afin qu'il ne se reproduise plus, est un impératif d'espérance. Or celle-ci ne s'ancre ni dans l'optimisme facile des révoltes ni dans la volonté pure des dragons de vertu, à l'homélie pieuse flottant béatement au-dessus de l'avilissement des impies. C'est en sachant l'horreur à sa portée qu'on peut commencer à espérer l'éviter. La détresse est condition de l'espoir, celle-là même qui nous rappelle que « les pires bourreaux nous ressemblent », et qu'avant « de s'identifier à tous les opprimés », il faudrait « apprendre à se reconnaître dans tous les assassins.

27. Cité dans Richard J. BERNSTEIN, *Radical Evil. A Philosophical Interrogation*, Oxford, Polity Press, 2002 (2001), p. 215.

28. François BIZOT, *Le saut du varan* (coll. « Folio »), Paris, Gallimard, p. 58. Dans *Le silence du bourreau*, Bizot rapporte le portrait que dressait Joseph Kessel, procureur américain, des nazis enfermés dans les geôles de Nuremberg, juste avant leur procès: « Il décrit [...] l'animalité et la dégénérescence des traits de chacun des nazis réunis en meute dans la salle, de telle sorte que la possibilité de reconnaître un tant soit peu de soi-même en ces 'faux demi-dieux' n'effleure jamais l'esprit d'un être humain digne de ce nom. » (SB, 34) Or, poursuit-il, « ma cible est plus difficile à reconnaître: elle revêt le visage de tout un chacun » (SB, 35).

Les pires bourreaux nous ressemblent²⁹. » Reconnaître le mal dont on est l'auteur, et se reconnaître dans le mal que font les autres, cela n'est pas la fin de l'espérance, mais le début de la compassion.

*Memorial University
St. John's, T.-N.*

S O M M A I R E

Dans son livre *Le Portail*, François Bizot raconte sa captivité dans un camp de prisonniers khmer rouge. En plus d'y dépeindre le sort du détenu, cet ouvrage se livre à une véritable enquête sur la nature de l'homme à partir de la figure de Douch, tortionnaire impitoyable à qui il doit cependant sa vie et sa liberté. Sa réflexion, lucide et difficile, rejette l'idée d'un mal hors d'atteinte, si défiguré par la haine et la colère qu'il en perde ses traits humains. Le texte qui précède vise à donner un cadre philosophique à cette intuition. Suivant l'itinéraire d'Emmanuel Kant tracé dans *La religion dans les limites de la simple raison*, nous examinerons les dangers derrière l'idée de la volonté diabolique, celle qui aurait entièrement consommé l'individu au point de le rendre définitivement sourd à l'appel du bien.

S U M M A R Y

In his book *The Gate*, François Bizot relates his captivity in a Khmer rouge prison camp. In addition to depicting the fate of the inmate, he investigates the nature of the human being through the figure of Douch, a remorseless executioner to whom, however, he owes his life and freedom. His account, lucid and difficult, rejects the idea of an evil so disfigured by hatred and fury that it loses its human traits. The article that follows will look to provide this intuition with a philosophical frame. Following the thought of Immanuel Kant contained in *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, we will examine the dangers behind the notion of a diabolical will, one that would have contaminated the individual to such an extent he becomes definitively deaf to the call of goodness.

29. François BIZOT, *Le saut du varan*, p. 215.

“EVIL DOES EXIST IN THE WORLD”

ANDRÉ DUHAMEL

The phrase quoted in the title is not one of President Trump’s last morning *tweets*; it comes instead from its predecessor, former President Barack Obama, a man of quite different stature. Maybe, in the 2018 context of latent or overt conflict of the United States of America with North Korea, Iran or even Pakistan, Donald Trump will include this word, ‘evil,’ in his usual rude and crude vocabulary; but we can also presume that he will find something more fit to its own dislikes. In the world of international relations and power politics, those kinds of words – atrocity, barbaric, evil, rogue states¹ – are themselves a small piece of policy, or at least a piece of action. And that is why it is worth examining them in the context of their utterances: we could draw some lessons from it, and be better prepared for their next uses or for their next transformations.

So, back to Obama: ‘Evil does exist in the world’ occurs in President Barack Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize Speech, given at Oslo on December 10, 2009. This phrase drew the attention of many observers and commentators, both because it supported the use of military force (which might surprise in the context of the acceptance of such a prize) and because it seemed to echo a certain vocabulary still in vogue in the USA. It constitutes the first of two instances of the word “evil” in this speech:

As a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by [Ghandi’s and King’s] examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler’s armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda’s leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism – it is a recognition of history, the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.²

1. See Anna GEIS and Carmen WUNDERLICH, “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Comparing the Notions of ‘Rogue’ and ‘Evil’ in International Politics,” *International Politics*, 51 (2014), pp. 458-474, for a comparison between these two terms.

2. Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize Speech (December 10th, 2009), Associated Press.

Later in this paper, we will come back to the second instance; but we can raise, as of now, questions about not just the meaning of its use by the president of a great military power and the possible consequences of this, but also its use as a category for the analysis of present-day, and in particular international, politics. The term “evil” has in fact often been used by philosophers and political scientists for some decades now, essentially to refer to crisis situations and understand barbaric acts that cause extreme suffering. Thus it was introduced into the political lexicon following World War II and popularized by, among others, Hannah Arendt as a way of designating the actions of civil servants such as Eichmann in perpetrating genocide. Its use spread during the war in Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide and was subject to veritable inflation following September 11, 2001. Since then, it has been the object of many efforts at critical analysis, as witness the articles in the journal *International Relations* in 2004 and Jeffery’s anthology in 2008³ and, more recently in the journal *International Politics* (2014) and Jeffery’s own book (2016).

Many of these critical analyses challenge the idea that the term “evil” can play a constructive role in ethics and in the politics of international relations. The argument is that, on the contrary, it should be eschewed in those fields, because it is harmful in several ways. According to this reasoning, first of all, the term “evil” cannot serve as a philosophical or psychological concept because it designates what is above all a *religious*, indeed *mythic*, category; or at the very least a moralizing category that refers to moral absolutes, reifies the alternatives, and thus eludes the need to make distinctions for grasping the real and the historical.⁴ Second, the vocabulary of evil is argued to derive from political *rhetoric* and polemical speeches, which make an appeal to the *pathos* of fear in order to demonize the adversary and situate the adversary outside the moral sphere. In this way, evil becomes another word for “inhuman,” “monstrous,” “barbaric,” etc.⁵ and thus clouds the issue of responsibility/accountability for our actions towards it.⁶ Moreover – speaking now in

3. See *International Relations*, 18 (2004), and Renée JEFFERY (ed.), *Confronting Evil in International Relations. Ethical Response to Problem of Moral Agency*, New York NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

4. “Evil is a black-hole concept which gives us the illusion of explanation, when what it actually represents is the failure to understand [...]. The idea of evil is not a philosophical concept at all, nor even a religious one. It is a mythological concept that has a specific role to play in certain narratives.” (Phillip COLE, *The Myth of Evil. Demonizing the Ennemy*, New York NY, Praeger, 2006, p. 236)

5. “Equation of terrorist acts with evil can freeze our understanding by conflating condemnation with explanation in other ways.” [Douglas KLUSMEYER, & Astri SUHRKE (2002), “Comprehending ‘Evil’: Challenges for Law and Policy,” *Ethics and International Affairs*, 16 (2002), p. 35]

6. “To portray an evil enemy, then, is to close off the possibility of understanding and communication and negotiation, to make all history disappear.” (Phillip COLE, *The Myth of Evil*, p. 233)

ethical terms – “evil” is a general *evaluative* term, which spills out of the bounds of the *normative* vocabulary essential to an understanding and justification of phenomena such as that of the “just war” and is more distant still from judicial vocabulary (such as that of war crimes, genocide, etc.). The indeterminacy of its content cannot replace a system of norms; on the contrary, it could harm such a system.⁷ Finally, “evil” appears to be all the harder to define because it is a *superlative* that most often designates extreme atrocities: it goes beyond that which is merely bad or wrong; evil is the worst of the worst, exceeding what can be imagined or even spoken.⁸ Thus it has a dramatic impact; for while it may seem impossible to us that human beings should commit such abominable acts, those acts are nevertheless committed: evil possesses such magnitude that it causes stupor.⁹ In short, the notion of evil is argued to belong to an ideological discourse that produces effects of ignorance.

The risks associated with using the vocabulary of “evil” thus appear to be just as much methodological and epistemological ones as ethical and political ones properly speaking. Ethical and political considerations are especially delicate when it is a question of the use of force and of the problems associated with war and peace. When President Obama declares “evil does exist in the world,” is he reconnecting with the discourse of his predecessors George W. Bush (who used the term “axis of evil” to refer to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea)¹⁰ or even Ronald Reagan (who used the term “evil empire” to designate the former Soviet superpower)?¹¹ The fact is, the Nobel Peace Prize Speech was not the first occasion on which Barack Obama made statements on this subject, though his previous ones related to other contexts. For example, in August

7. “Evil defies definition, and ultimately when we use it we are unclear about the attributes of the evil person or action [...]. This vocabulary suffers from a conceptual slipperiness and indeterminacy [and] that is why it cannot stand as an alternative to the vocabulary of norms.” [Farid ABDEL-NOUR, “An International Ethics of Evil?”, *International Relations*, 18 (2004), p. 429-430]

8. In his article “Is Evil just very bad?” in *Philosophical Studies*, 163 (2013), pp. 177-196, Todd Calder tries to argue that ‘evil’ is qualitatively different from mere wrongdoing, and not only quantitatively different.

9. It is a term of “intensification” that serves to bend moral space out of shape, according to Steven DEWIJDE, “Defining Evil: Insights from the Problem of Dirty Hands,” *The Monist*, 85 (2002) pp. 213, 217.

10. “States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an Axis of Evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.” [State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002; quoted in Matt G. BONHAM & Daniel HERADSTVEIT, “What the Axis of Evil Metaphor Did to Iran,” *Middle East Journal*, 61 (2007) p. 422]

11. Although the vocabulary of evil tends to recur in the language used by Republican presidents, it is not wholly absent from that of Democratic presidents. Thus while several hundred occurrences of the term “evil” have been found in the speeches of George W. Bush, Bush’s predecessor Bill Clinton’s record is not so different, according to Richard J. BERNSTEIN, *The Abuse of Evil. The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11*, London, Polity, 2005, p. 192.

2008, during the presidential race, in an interview with Pastor Rick Warren, he stated this view:

Evil does exist [...]. We see evil all the time. We see evil in Darfur, sadly in the streets of our cities, in parents viciously abusing their children [...]. It has to be confronted squarely. As individuals we won't be able to erase evil in the world, this is God's task, but we can be His soldiers in that process [...]. I strongly believe in humility in how we approach it, because a lot of evil has been perpetrated in the name of confronting it.¹²

The last statement in this passage, emphasizing as it does humility and the danger of giving rise to evil despite good intentions, seems to differ from that quoted above, from the Nobel Peace Prize Speech. In the present case, not only does evil refer also to non-political acts (the behaviour of abusive parents); it seems as well to imply a self-critical perspective. If such a perspective were also present in international politics, perhaps evil would not be exclusively an ideological and univocal category. It could then perhaps contribute to the evaluation of a situation, a decision, an actor, indeed a policy. The fact is, the vocabulary of evil is very old and very rich; and it is important to explore it to verify whether we would truly gain by dropping it.

It is this that I wish to examine here, in the light of recent debates about this concept in political philosophy and in the ethics of international relations, relying in particular on analyses by Renée Jeffery and Farid Abdel-Nour¹³, which, in contrast to the publications mentioned above, grant the concept of evil a degree of analytic power. I will begin by rapidly differentiating some of the senses held by this concept in the Western history of ideas, in order to better pinpoint in what follows the various objects that can be designated by the term "evil" and the different ways of responding to evil. This will make it possible to understand the ambivalence of the category of evil in international politics, as analysed by Abdel-Nour, and thus to shed further light on President Obama's speech.¹⁴

The ambivalence of the category of evil in the history of ideas

As just emphasized, the idea of evil is very old, probably as old as efforts at the moral evaluation of human suffering and its causes. So significant and so large a question has of course been subject to more than one interpretation in

12. Barack OBAMA, "Does Evil Exist?" Debate between Barack Obama and John McCain at pastor Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California (August 16). www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBbeCaDCQUI, consulted April 2017 (author's transcription).

13. See note 2 above.

14. It is not my purpose here to list and analyze all uses of the term "evil" by President Obama. Nor will I limit my examination to political speeches, whether American or other. What concerns me here is the philosophical meaning and the political function of this vocabulary.

the history of ideas in the West, both as part of religion and theological conceptualizations and as part of modern secular approaches of a philosophical, sociological, or psychological kind.¹⁵

Within the first frame of reference, that is, the theological one, the presence of evil in the world represents a major challenge to the conception of a God who is the origin of the just and the good. Indeed, the various efforts at theodicy have sought to make compatible the permanent presence of evil in the universe and the divine principle at the origin of that universe: is God responsible for evil? and if so, how and why? One of the earliest efforts at an explanation is of a cosmological nature and is found in Manicheism: on this interpretation, evil is a substantive reality, a force that is eternally opposed to its adverse principle, the good.¹⁶ In this perspective, God does not carry the weight of evil, because the latter is a principle possessing independent force. It flows from this that human beings are also not responsible for the origin of evil; rather, they are its victims or its instruments. Nevertheless, it is up to human beings to distance themselves from evil to the extent possible. Here, evil serves as a causal or explanatory principle before being a criterion for moral evaluation. Thus seeing evil as a force that is at the source of everything bad is a way of not requiring human beings to assume the weight of their own misdeeds. This conception, according to Jeffery and Rengger,¹⁷ not only holds sway in the present-day understanding of international relations, but is even the principal template for that understanding. Certainly, this is the conception one finds in speeches and foreign policy from the Bush administration relating to the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq.¹⁸

The Church Fathers, chief among them Saint Augustine, strongly opposed this interpretation; for even though it does not attribute the burden of evil to God, it avoids doing so by setting up another force in competition with God. Like the Manicheans, Augustine holds that God is not responsible for evil; but, in opposition to the Manicheans, he upholds the idea that evil does not have its own reality. That is, it does not exist on its own in the world; it is human beings who introduce it. Human beings can turn their gaze away from the divine and the good and thus corrupt their own desires. What is in question

15. I am here intentionally leaving to one side the ancient Socratic and Platonic conception of evil done “out of ignorance.”

16. A helpful source on this topic is the brief study by François Decret, *Mani et la tradition manichéenne*², Paris, Seuil, 1995.

17. Renée JEFFERY & Nicholas RENNGER, “Moral Evil and International Relations,” *Review of International Affairs*, 25 (2005), p. 3.

18. That at any rate is the thesis of Peter SINGER, *The President of Good and Evil. The Ethics of George W. Bush*, New York NY, Dutton, 2004, p. 209, whose position is discussed at length by Renée JEFFERY, *Evil and International Relations. Human Suffering in an Age of Terror*, New York NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 130-136, 142-143. See also the more general analysis by Richard J. Bernstein in *The Abuse of Evil. The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11*, London, Polity, 2005, on American political discourse since September 2001.

here is a more strictly *moral* conception, because it entails a fundamental responsibility by human beings in relation to evil, even though the root of that responsibility (original sin) is ancient. In this perspective, evil does not have intrinsic substantive reality; it consists, on the contrary, of no more than the absence of good, as is set out in *The City of God*¹⁹: "evil in fact is not a substance; it is the absence of good that is called evil" (Book XI, Ch. 9); "but in reality, nowhere is evil a substance, it is nothing more than the absence of good" (Book XI, Ch. 22). Under this conception, evil is in the human being and it is up to human beings to turn away from evil in their actions and motivations by performing the necessary conversion. To claim, like the Manicheans, that evil is a force that is present in the universe appears like a way of turning away both from humankind and God.

The question of evil does not disappear in the secular conceptions of modernity nor at the time of the Enlightenment; but it is now conceived not in the terms of theodicy, but rather of an "anthropodicy," relating to the responsibility of human beings themselves for the evil of "man's inhumanity to man." Here, the question consists no longer of how to reconcile divine goodness with the existence of evil, but rather of how the existence of evil can threaten our conception of the human being. This is why the cosmological explanation of "natural evil" (human suffering) gives way to "moral evil" (human sin) and "metaphysical evil" (human finitude), to use the distinctions made by Leibniz in his *Theodicy* (1710)²⁰. Thus Kant conceptualizes evil as "radical evil": not because it is extreme, but by virtue of its being a human capacity that cannot be uprooted or an innate human tendency to choose evil maxims for action. "We call a man evil, however, not because he performs actions that are evil (contrary to law) but because the actions are of such a nature that we may infer from them the presence in him of evil maxims," he writes in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* in 1793²¹. It is the will that is at issue here for Kant, when human beings are misled by maxims that allow them to believe they can make exceptions in their own case and thus obtain benefits without respecting the moral law. Evil is thus not desired intrinsically or for its own sake (which would amount to malice or the *diabolical*, entailing a risk of returning to Manicheism); rather, just as in the Augustinian conception, it falls to human responsibility.

19. AUGUSTINE, *The City of God against the Pagans*, transl. Robert W. DYSON, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

20. Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans E. M. HUGGARD, New York NY, Open Court, 1999, Chapter 21.

21. Immanuel KANT, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, transl. Allan Wood & George DI GIOVANNI, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, at the beginning of Part I.

The present era undoubtedly retains and discusses this conception of evil less than it does a different one, advanced by Hannah Arendt in her reports on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and 1962. The subtitle of the book that emerged from her reports, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*²², emphasizes not the radical nature of evil but rather its banal nature, in other words, the absence of ill will. Even if there is a propensity to evil in human beings, it could result, explains Arendt, from an ordinary will placed at the service of abominable acts and policies: on this view, evil is extreme in its effects and results, but not in individual motivation. According to Arendt, it derives above all from an “absence of thought and imagination”²³ by which we are to understand not a lack of knowledge, shrewdness, or courage, but rather an absence of moral judgment about good and evil, the true and the false, the just and the unjust. Thus the concept of “the banality of evil” distinguishes actions from their underlying intentions or maxims, in direct contrast to the Kantian conception. The responsibility for evil is not thereby removed from the agent; but this conception emphasizes the work of thought over the cultivation of desires and motives.²⁴ The fortunes of Arendt’s formula in recent decades could lead one to believe that this represents the farthest advances in secular representations of evil, leaving others in the dust.²⁵ However, nothing could be less certain, for we may doubt that all conceptualizations of evil fit under the umbrella of this one idea. The legacy of Western thought on this subject would appear to be marked by deep ambiguities and indeed divergences, which it is profitable to analyse.

We can see this if we pay particular attention to the fact that these different conceptions emphasize different objects. First: If evil represents a pure force acting in the world, we will pit against it its polar opposite, the force of the good. This is the approach that was observable in the rhetoric of George W. Bush, who opposed Good to Evil categorically. If the roots of this conception are Manichean (and thus heretical from the perspective of Christian thought), then what we are dealing with is regressive discourse, because it

22. Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York NY, Penguin Classics, 1993.

23. The ‘banality of evil’ phrase appears mainly in the Post-scriptum of Arendt’s work.

24. Evil is indeed an absence, but the absence of reason: reason is thus spared the weight of evil.

25. The historical succession of conceptions of evil can, on the other hand, give rise to efforts at integration, as is the case with W. Casebeer, who strives to articulate these various conceptions of evil with the principal moral theories (virtue-based, deontological, and consequentialist) in a “nascent theory.” See William D. CASEBEER, “Knowing Evil When You See It: Uses for the Rhetoric of Evil in International Relations, *International Relations*, 18 (2004), pp. 441-451, in particular 445-446. For a rich analysis of more arendtian ideas (the right to have rights, superfluousness, plurality) in the realm of international relations, see Patrick HAYDEN, *Political Evil in a Global Age: Hannah Arendt and International Theory*, London, Routledge, 2009.

draws upon an ancient, indeed primitive, conception of evil. In opposing good and evil in terms of incompatible forces distinct from each other on every level, this type of rhetoric hardly allows for conceiving of the possibility that one's own responses to evil could constitute or generate forms of evil in their turn. Second: The situation is different, however, if evil is understood based on other bearers, namely the agents themselves, as in the Augustinian conception. If there is evil in the world, then it flows from bad agents, that is, from *evildoers*, from its principal producers – individuals, leaders, regimes. The question of evil then becomes the question of the corruption of these agents, a corruption expressed in acts that are not just reprehensible but monstrous, a fact that it is up to these agents to acknowledge if they are to be forgiven and redeemed. Third: The situation is similar to that of the second scenario if we keep the determining principle of the will, that is, maxims (in the Kantian sense), front and centre. On this view, evil resides in the human heart and in self-deception rather than in one's acts, which can be separated from what motivates them. Even though, according to Kant, evil cannot be desired for its own sake (cannot be the product of an intrinsically bad will), it can fool human beings and it is this possibility that remains at the roots of evil. The fourth scenario: Evil exists in the world by virtue of the fact of human actions, which are on this view in a sense the instruments of evil, beyond which it is not necessary to go in order to pinpoint evil's characteristics. Whether this last approach does or does not rest on the idea of "the banality of evil" is less important than the fact that acts are susceptible of more precise definition and can thus come under the heading of norms. And norms can even, on this view, subsume structures, systems, and state policies that lead to such acts. A force – agents – motives – acts: These represent very different localizations of evil in the world and demand accordingly differing responses. How do we reply to evil in these diverse cases?

Thus, the polar opposition of the forces of good to those of evil calls for a form of retribution, vengeance, or punishment; or else at the very least, it is a question of restoring a balance of forces that has been disrupted by an initial action and at the most of eradicating or destroying the adverse force in an effort a purification.²⁶ The reply to evil is accompanied by fear, fury, anger; given this, it is no surprise when we start to hear terms associated with war, indeed with the Crusades,²⁷ terms that have a religious as well as a moral tenor but that relegate the question of means – military or political – to a lower level of priority. One could even argue that the abuse of this kind of vocabulary is

26. "The key to US and British insistence on war [...] was that Saddam was evil, and that it was not moral to allow this sort of Evil to exist in the world." (Stephen CHAN, *Out of Evil. New International Politics and Old Doctrines of War*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 81)

27. See the conclusive analysis by Graham MADDOX, "The 'Crusade' Against Evil: Bush's Fundamentalism," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 49 (2003), pp. 398-411.

anti-political,²⁸ because if the bad force is placed outside the ambit of customary political mechanisms, it no longer challenges us to consider the question of proportionate means and the problem of the assignment of responsibilities. On the other hand, when it is the agent or the will that is the locus of evil and responsibility is brought back into the foreground, reparations, reconciliation, and forgiveness can come back into their own. No doubt some will say that the atrocities themselves are less forgivable than the people who committed them;²⁹ but recent modern history has shown, for example through transitional institutions of justice such as truth and reconciliation commissions, that transformation at both the moral and political levels is possible, accompanied by feelings of grief, regret, humility, and remorse. The vocabulary of evil does not, so used, render recourse to norms less likely, especially in the last scenario, which in effect is one of prevention. The fact is, if evil indicates an extreme violation that staggers the imagination, not to say shakes our trust in humankind, it also excites fear and indicates a normative void that can be filled through the establishment of institutions and policies adjusted to objectives of protection. True, moral and judicial norms do not occupy the same space as the evaluative and superlative space of the vocabulary of evil and would undoubtedly leave in the shadows many of the piercing questions that it poses; but their presence makes it possible to restore the moral language of responsibility: Who are the agents, what are the deeds, from whom are we to expect justice and reparation, and by what means? If recourse to “evil” does not produce these effects on its own, it could conduce to them, at least under some of its meanings. This is the characteristic that it seemed we could discern in the statements made by President Obama in 2008, and they serve as the framework for a final effort to conceptualize evil, this time directly within the context of the ethics of international relations.

Evil as Other / Evil as Mine in the ethics of international relations

In his 2004 article “An International Ethics of Evil?,” Farid Abdel-Nour proposes to distinguish between two uses of the concept in this field, one postulating Evil as something wholly Other that is alien to us, “evil as absolutely-not-self,” and the other postulating Evil as something to be inquired into that could concern ourselves as well, “evil as connected-to-self.” The first sense is close to the Manichean meaning of evil briefly sketched out above. The second is close to the other conceptions subsequently described. These kinships include the question of the localization of evil and how to respond to it.

28. See Richard J. BERNSTEIN, *The Abuse of Evil*, London, Polity, 2005, pp. 11, 16.

29. In effect, forgiveness does not consist of justifying or excusing atrocities, but rather of becoming reconciled with the authors of the atrocities: see Peter E. DIGESER, “Forgiveness, the Unforgivable and International Relations,” *International Relations*, 18 (2004), pp. 484, 493.

In the first sense, evil appears like something transcendent, something beyond our capacity to analyse and act:

[It] tends to place evil squarely outside the self and to make it extrinsic and separable from the self. Evil becomes a category with which to create a distance between one's actions and one's self, and with which to refer to the other (usually without much concern for a similar distance). The consequences of relying on this conception of evil when thinking about societal affairs can be quite serious, leading one to target one's adversaries for eradication, rather than simply for defeat.³⁰

Thus evil can give meaning to what seems at first sight to lie beyond our comprehension, by, in a sense, objectivizing it. In this sense, it can very well serve to mobilize us against an "enemy," but at the risk of doing so without nuance or proportion, in a headlong rush forward, because this evil beyond oneself is also the symptom of the limitations of one's power in the world, indeed of one's impotence to act in the world. It corresponds to a moralizing and dualizing position that demonizes the adversary and authorizes itself to circumvent existing international norms in order to eradicate the adversary, without being wary of the excesses this can lead to. For the destruction of Evil does not automatically end in the triumph of the good, as if the latter were the obligatory residue of the struggle. The good always requires to be built and is not simply (to stand Augustine's formula on its head) the absence of evil. As absolutely-not-self, evil does appear in all its purity, as intrinsic evil. But it is not only Other, a not-self; it is also, relative to the agent, a possession, a not-self that demands that it be extirpated, purged, externalized. This externalization does not assume the shape of general and impartial norms. As Abdel-Nour, following Bernstein, emphasizes, it is situated, rather, beyond the political "friend-enemy" distinction.³¹

In contrast, the second use of the idea of evil, that of "evil as connected-to-self," authorizes a critical and self-critical posture that has the potential to support the sphere of norms, because it is able to nuance the political goal envisaged: evil is not so much in the world as it is in us:

This latter conception highlights evil's connection to self [...]. Evil then is not radically other. It is uncomfortably close. Its distance from ordinary life and ordinary vices is small. Distance certainly exists between ordinary persons and Eichmann, but that the difference can be captured by the relative concept of distance, and by such a small step at that, is what is most disturbing about [it].³²

Adopting a secularist perspective, Abdel-Nour makes Arendt the patron of this second category; but we have seen that the Augustinian and Kantian

30. Farid ABDEL-NOUR, "An International Ethics of Evil?," *International Relations*, 18 (2004), pp. 430-431.

31. Farid ABDEL-NOUR, "An International Ethics of Evil?," p. 433.

32. Farid ABDEL-NOUR, "An International Ethics of Evil?," pp. 433-434.

conceptions of evil also situated evil within the agent. But this is of less import here. For the question is no longer to know whether evil exists, where it is found, and how to combat it; rather, under a reflexive approach, the question is what the use of the vocabulary of evil reveals about the speaker and the speaker's situation.³³ What is at issue is less its meaning or its referent in the world than its function or role for its users.³⁴ Here evil does not appear to be a solution but rather a question, the signal that our customary normative and evaluative categories have been exceeded. For this reason, it has a transitional role and significance, that of motivating us to reconstruct all or part of our vocabulary, and indeed our institutional systems. According to Abdel-Nour, this second category invites us to critical and historical reflection on the responses that have been made in the struggle against evil, because it is now not the exclusive appurtenance of a bad other, but can result from our own deeds.³⁵ Eradication is thus no longer the order of the day (total victory would be impossible); evil's rejection calls for prudence and if need be reparations, if we are its sources.³⁶

Abdel-Nour's analysis, like the brief historical overview above, allows us to emphasize the equivocations and tensions likely to inhabit recourse to the vocabulary of evil. But at the same time, this ambivalence – both generally and in particular as it relates to international politics – constitutes its richness. We cannot be satisfied with rejecting this ambivalence. It can play a role in international policy and constitute an interpretive tool, indeed serve as an analytic category. Thus, if the vocabulary of evil already has meaning in a speech, it is also meaningful in policy orientation, because if it carries more than one sense, it allows us to make a number of distinctions with the potential for shedding light on the real. It is these distinctions that may be found in the presentation of a foreign policy, although without being capable of justifying such a policy on their own. Let us return to the Oslo Speech with which we began this inquiry.

Our inquiry now allows us to establish that Obama's speech occupies a middle position between Abdel-Nour's two categories, a position that I will term realistic, situated between the rhetoric of Evil as stranger and that of Evil as inclination, a position that makes it possible to reject both G. W. Bush's

33. Joshua MILLS-KNUTSEN, *The Rhetoric of Evil: How Failure is Turned to One's Advantage*, in Nancy BILLIAS (ed.), *Promoting and Producing Evil*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2010, p. 293.

34. This reflexivity is also highlighted by Renée JEFFERY, "Beyond Banality? Ethical Responses to Evil in Post-September 11 International Relations," *International Affairs*, 81 (2005), p. 178.

35. Farid ABDEL-NOUR, "An International Ethics of Evil?", 18 (2004), pp. 436-437.

36. "Evil has been defeated but, ironically if not tragically, new evils remain," says Stephen CHAN, *Out of Evil*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 90. In this perspective, there is never a final battle against evil; rather, the struggle ceaselessly recommences. For this reason, the struggle does not calm the spirit and can in fact seem discouraging. But it is possible that clarity is also the key to realism.

manicheism and a certain form of idealistic pacifism³⁷. The concept of evil thus allows for an understanding of both the continuity in current American foreign policy and the new posture that gives it meaning. No doubt it also allows us to understand how come prudence has taken the place of arrogance, multilateralism that of unilateralism, and openness to the Muslim world that of mistrust.

And now let us recall the first occurrence of the term in the Oslo Speech: stating that evil “exists in the world” provides a foundation for a “realistic” position that is cognizant of power relations and their dilemmas and leads to an antipacifism that distances itself, in international policy, from the non-violent figures of Martin Luther King and Gandhi (as evident in phrases like “purity of indignation,” “idealized world”). It is a question here of rejecting innocence or moral purity and practical hesitations. Here we come close to evil as Other: it serves to designate obscure, hard-to-grasp forces in our present world, or actors/regimes that are strangers to the norms of international law and of rules of engagement (“vicious adversary that abides by no rules”). With these forces and these actors (for example, al Qaeda or ISIS), it appears that negotiation and compromise are not possible: only capitulation, surrender, or destruction.

But the second occurrence of the term, in a passage of the same Speech that I have so far postponed quoting, adjusts and indeed corrects this reading, because in contrast it is close to the conception of evil as Mine. In fact, it restores a degree of reflexivity and accordingly makes a call for prudence:

[N]o Holy War can ever be a just war. For if you truly believe that you are carrying out the divine will, then there is no need for restraint [...]. Such a warped view of religion is not just incompatible with the concept of peace, but the purpose of faith – for the one rule that lies at the heart of every major religion is that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Adhering to this law of love has always been the core struggle of human nature. We are fallible. We make mistakes, and fall victim to the temptations of pride, and power, and sometimes evil. Even those of us with the best intentions will at times fail to right the wrongs before us.

Observe the difference between this and the first occurrence: evil is no longer in the world “over there,” outside; nor does it serve to designate a type of extremist actor who is a stranger to the normative and evaluative universe. It falls to us to take responsibility for it as well, even if in spite of ourselves we are its victims. Note also the nature of the vocabulary and the progression in the terms enumerated: “pride, and power, and sometimes evil.” This comes close to the Augustinian and Kantian sphere, in which evil does not lie outside

37. For a general examination of Obama’s political thought at the beginning of its first mandate, See Bart SCHULTZ, “Obama’s Political Philosophy. Pragmatism, Politics and the University of Chicago,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 39 (2009), pp. 127-173.

our own responsibility, because it resides within our own moral space. We are capable of producing it with the best intentions in the world.³⁸ Finally, note the presence in this speech of the reminder about international norms (Geneva conventions, condemnation of torture), which represented a lesser concern for the Bush administration. In sum, the presence of the term “evil” remains significant in the Oslo Speech, both for the limited number of times the word occurs (there is no doubt that no *rhetoric* of evil is to be found here) and for the specific use of this concept in both its guises, as Other and as Ours.

Taken together, these two passages clearly demonstrate the ambivalence in present-day conceptions of evil and the appropriateness of making necessary distinctions. For it is also possible to see in this speech that “metaphysical evil” allows both for supporting recourse to force in opposing evil (“recognition of history, the imperfections of man and the limits of reason”) and for acknowledging that it is possible to misuse it to the point of ourselves producing evil (“We are fallible. We make mistakes.”). That is why “evil,” as an evaluative and superlative concept, while it allows for giving meaning to extraordinary events and extreme human acts of violence and pointing to the limitations of current norms, cannot act directly on and in the world. It is not action-guiding, it does not give rise to a decision-making procedure or offer a robust method of justification.

Conclusion

Recourse to the concept of evil, whether in spite or because of its ambiguities, broadens our moral vocabulary to the point of including superlative, dramatic, or “mythological” concepts,³⁹ for it places at our disposal language that can reflect the experience of suffering, horror, and indignation. This language, however, cannot without danger function on its own. That is why it is also necessary to align it with the system of norms, though this means trading off the loss of norms’ evaluative and superlative dimensions against gains in their efficacy (as happened in 1948 with the creation of the term “genocide” by Raphael Lemkin) and in the form of their entrenchment in international declarations and institutions (the most recent of these being the International Criminal Tribunals).⁴⁰ Since these instruments function under the rule of law

38. In this respect, the Oslo Speech is in the same spirit as statements made by Barack Obama in his 2008 interview with Pastor Warren.

39. See again Phillip Cole, *The Myth of Evil*, p. 23.

40. In their analyses, Abdel-Nour and Lu both clearly indicate this dual function of “evil,” without for all that reducing it to mere negative rhetoric: “[T]he concept of evil [...] serves its moral function when it stimulates moral reflection, focuses attention on the moral foundations of our practices and raises questions of moral responsibility for human suffering, with a view to its prevention. At the same time, those who employ the language of evil must remain vigilant of its potential abuse, either to exclude persons or groups from our universe of moral obligation,

and are thus warranted to be impartial, it becomes difficult for the State, in the name of the “war on terror” and the eradication of Evil, to refuse to submit to them. To do so would be to return to the conception of evil as Other and to pre-emptively whitewash the actions of one’s own State’s soldiers, citizens, and leaders.

Thus it is not sufficient to invoke evil in order to present (or oppose) a foreign policy, whether the killing of bin Laden or to criticize a nuclear agreement with Iran. But the recurrent recourse to this concept, in both political speeches and academic studies, is an incentive to develop an ethics and political philosophy of evil. “Political evil” could mandate a thought that is post-metaphysical but also “post-secular,” one that would seek to produce a secular concept of evil but that would nevertheless manage to pinpoint evil’s persisting role in the globalized public space, preserving the concept of the banality of evil (with an emphasis on actions and their consequences) while not neglecting evil’s radical nature, understood in historical, social, and political terms.⁴¹ Understanding evil would thus serve, for philosophy, as a means of combatting it and yet being committed to peace.

*Département de philosophie et d'éthique appliquée
Université de Sherbrooke (Campus Longueuil), QC*

SUMMARY

The vocabulary of ‘evil’ is widely used in the realm of international politics today, both by actors and academics. Is this term action-guiding and useful as a concept? Some critics argue that its religious origin, evaluative nature and rhetorical impact are negative enough to put it aside; others consider that we need such a term to name what is more than unjust or wrong, but the worst that humans can do to other humans for political reasons. Taking as an example some speeches of former president of the United States Barak Obama, we will argue that ‘evil’ can be useful if it serves not to demonize an ennemy, but as a tool of self-examination. We will, after examining some of the meanings of ‘evil,’ in the history of ideas, find much help in the distinction made by Abdel-Nour between ‘evil as a not self’ and ‘evil as related to self.’ It is precisely the same distinction that we find in the Obama’s speeches, and conversely do not find in other uses of the term; in this way, and granted that the vocabulary of international norms is also used, it helps to qualify different foreign policies and shows some action-guiding characteristics.

or to subvert fragile international and domestic moral order.” Catherine Lu, “Agents, Structures and Evil in World Politics,” *International Relations*, 18 (2004), p. 507.

41. In this we are following the suggestion made by Jeffery’ works, whose development deserves an independent study. This approach would add a fourth category to Leibniz’s distinction between natural, moral, and metaphysical evil: *Theodicy*, New York NY, Open Court, 1999, chapter 21.

SOMMAIRE

Le vocabulaire du ‘mal’ est d’un large usage en politique internationale, tant chez les acteurs que chez les chercheurs. Ce terme peut-il servir de guide pour l’action et a-t-il valeur de concept? Certains le rejettent à cause de ses origines religieuses, de sa nature évaluative et de ses impacts rhétoriques; pour d’autres au contraire, nous avons besoin d’un tel concept pour désigner les atrocités qui dépassent de loin les actes simplement injustes dans le domaine politique. En prenant comme exemple quelques discours de l’ex-président américain Barak Obama, nous voudrions montrer que le vocabulaire du mal a sa place en ce domaine, s’il sert moins à diaboliser un ennemi que d’instrument autocritique. En explorant ses différentes significations en histoire des idées, nous utiliserons la distinction pertinente introduite par Abdel-Nour entre le mal comme ‘étranger à soi’ et le mal comme ‘lié au soi’, ce dernier relevant de la responsabilité de l’acteur. C’est cette même distinction qui se retrouve dans les discours d’Obama, et qu’à l’inverse ignorent d’autres emplois du terme; de la sorte, et en se conjuguant avec le vocabulaire des normes et des droits, un usage critique du concept du ‘mal’ aide à distinguer différentes politiques étrangères et montre son utilité pour l’action.

RECENSIONS ET COMPTES RENDUS¹

PHILOSOPHIE

William E. MANN, **God, Modality, and Morality**, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 2015, 15,5 × 23,5 cm, 384 p., ISBN 978-0-1993-707-64.

There is a naval gazing, academic joke about a chemist, a physicist, and an economist on a deserted island. Having only a fire and a can of beans, they argue about how to open it and avoid starvation. To get the beans the physicist suggests dropping the tin at a certain angle to fracture it while the chemist suggests heating it to increase the internal pressure thus bursting it. Predictably, in accordance with most jokes, the naysayer finds fault with both options as the contents would be spoiled by falling into the sand. When asked what he, the economist would do, he responds, “Well, first we *assume* we have a can-opener ...” The banality of this response is important to keep in mind when we examine William Mann’s 2015 book, *God, Modality and Morality*.

Dr. Mann’s treatise reflects on the question “What difference would God’s existence make to the world and its inhabitants?” (p. 1) If it seems that Mann is asking an existential question regarding the existence and utility of God, the reader will find him/herself unintentionally misled. Rather than take the natural step in exploring his own thesis which would demand an exploration of a world without God compared to a world with God, Mann chooses to examine the influence of God on modality and morality without considering how these issues figure in a God-free world. Like our island economist, it becomes apparent that Mann is treating the existence of God as a given rather than a variable.

While it may appear that Mann is quickly off on the wrong foot in that he is defying his own thesis, I do not intend to throw the Christened baby out with the holy water. Mann approaches this project in a sound and methodical manner that demonstrates an attempt to apply scientific processes to the spiritual. Mann organizes his work in three distinct streams: 1) the nature of God, 2) the relationship between God and the Earth’s inhabitants (modality) and, finally, 3) the nature of morality. I intend to explore these sections with a view to analyzing how they support the defined thesis. I shall suspend my objections to the premise of the argument and try to limit my comments on whether or not he proves his thesis rather than on the validity of the thesis itself.

1. L’ampleur exceptionnelle du dossier restreint d’autant l’espace habituellement consacré aux recensions et comptes rendus, qu’ils retrouveront dans le prochain numéro.

Before examining God's impact, it is important to have commonly accepted understanding of the nature of God. This is exactly what Mann does in the first section. Mann does not so much defend his idea of the nature of God as simply defines it. God is extolled for his absolute perfection and everything that a good Christian would attribute to him. Setting aside the Christian bias, Mann offers three pillars that are central to his argument: God's **simplicity, sovereignty and omnipotence/omnipresence**. It appears that if Mann does not succeed in setting up these conditions, then his argument is not built upon rock but sand.

He affords a lot of attention to the simplicity of God. The implication is that should we accept this non-controversial approach, we will reach the inevitable conclusion that simplicity begets indubitability. If something is simple, then it is evident and cannot therefore be easily subjected the sophistic art of skepticism. His primary tool in this effort is the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity (DDS).

The DDS contends that "God is radically unlike creatures in that he is devoid of any complexity or composition, whether physical or metaphysical. Besides lacking spatial and temporal parts, God is free of matter-form composition, potency-act composition, and existence-essence composition. There is also no real distinction between God as subject of his attributes and his attributes. God is thus in a sense requiring clarification *identical* to each of his attributes, which implies that each attribute is identical to every other one."² What this defines is that God is *otherworldly*. Given the importance to the argument that God's nature must be simple, Mann then moves to ensure that this assertion is, in itself, unassailable. For the sake of the holy trinity of alliteration, let us focus on the support his argument receives from St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Anselm of Canterbury.

The author draws from St. Augustine that God is simple, immutable and indistinguishable from his qualities. Here Mann asserts that "The ontological distinction between a substance and its qualities does not apply to a simple being" (p. 21) and ensures that this assertion is reinforced by St. Augustine in such treatments as given in the *De Trinitate* where St. Augustine contends that "[T]he vessel is not the liquid nor the god the colour nor the air the light or heat nor the soul the wisdom." (p. 21) He further reinforces this with the statement that "He is the same as his greatness." (p. 21)

Where St. Augustine sets the stage for simplicity, it is Anselm and Aquinas who complete the discussion. Anselm in *Proslogion* leaves no ambiguity when he states, "Therefore life, wisdom, and the like are not parts of You, but all of them are one, and each One of them is entirely what You are and what all the others are." (p. 22) Triangulating this argument, Mann quotes Aquinas in his final stanza in order to reinforce Anselm's credibility. Aquinas brings it all together and in doing so ensures that the concept of a simple and undivided God is not a controversial idea but one that is well founded and, coincidentally, in keeping – as we shall see – with the requirements of his argument. But simplicity is not enough. The straightforward concept of proving simplicity seems all but deserted in Mann's approach to God's sovereignty where he chooses to undergo some rather strenuous intellectual contor-

2. (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/>), Retrieved, 5 February 2018.

tions. It is his treatment of sovereignty that, in my opinion, unnecessarily calls upon a great deal of intellectual acrobatics.

While it is certainly important that God's sovereignty be established and understood for any good to come of this discussion, it seems odd to me that the author has chosen a binary approach as the main vehicle of proof. The concern I have in this is that given the attention that is demanded of the reader in following through with the thread of the argument, it is too much to ask for him/her to subject him/herself to what amounts to a little more than a vanity project on the part of the author. If God is all powerful can he create something that he cannot move? If God created 180 degree triangle can he not comprehend, given his own rules, a triangle of more than 180 degrees which puts a constrain on his power – of which no constraint can exist?

Mann presents the reader with two distinct treatments of the sovereignty of Gods' nature – those of René Descartes and St. Augustine only to choose neither. At the end of the argument he suggests that neither the Cartesian nor the Augustinian strategy threaten his narrative. The Cartesian strategy in establishing God's sovereignty being that of making all propositions contingent to God's omnipotence, while the Augustinian strategy preserves the distinction between contingent and necessary propositions while subsuming them all under God's rational comprehension. In my view, where Mann unnecessarily sets out to establish God's power and sovereignty, he oddly seems to fall short of a fight that he need not have picked. God's perfection as one of the pillars of his argument and the book, is assumed and it seems gratuitous to try and add scientific justification for his attributes of perfection.

However, both the attributes of simplicity and sovereignty are impotent if the final attribute is not proven – that of omnipresence. Simplicity implies that God is not limited to any bounded area and sovereignty implies that he is not constrained by higher influence, but it is omnipresence that is the most important to Mann's thesis because it demonstrates that God's influence is non-conditional and free of dualism.

Mann cleverly employs Aquinas as one of the justifications for omnipresence and he is right to point out that *Summa Theologiae* addresses the notion of simplicity, sovereignty and omnipresence. Sections Three and Seven are clear in stating that God is simple in that there are no component parts to his being. Section Seven goes further in stating that since the purpose of God is to exist, there can be nothing without God. So if something exists, God is there. There is an interesting corollary that we can draw from this. While Mann does a good job of establishing, through historic theological and philosophical sources the simplicity and sovereignty criteria, one could agree with the skeptic that these are simply a consequence of an already established personal choice and belief. If one believes in God, it is not too difficult of a stretch to believe that he is an entity and concept (simplicity) rather than a robed bearded man wandering around sharing his ideas of love and forgiveness. It is also easy to accept, if one already believes in God, that he has sovereignty over all things. These are concepts that, while abstract to be sure, are not overly controversial and require little defense in the context in which Mann's work operates.

But it is the omnipresence attribute that needs to be challenged. If God is perfect how can he be present for all the evil in the world? How can those who need his

perfection and support not feel his presence? Are there not places like the Sudan and Mali that God simply has forgotten? These are simple and common questions that Mann's approach dismisses. He does this by cleverly stating that God is undetectable and hidden from us (pp. 127-133). This is an interesting approach that seems tailored to bait the skeptics. Using the Aristotelian argument that visual perception only works when there is some distance between the eye and the object perceived (p. 129), Mann extrapolates that we cannot notice or detect God because he is everywhere around us – we are submerged in God so not only is he everywhere, but we, in fact, cannot notice him. The author cleverly draws on Aquinas when stating that, "By Aquinas's own lights, God is close to us than anything else is. It should not surprise us, then, if that ultimate closeness prevents us from properly detecting God." (p. 129) This is what Mann labels "divine hiddenness." God's mode of existence differs so radically from our human mode that it is impossible for us to ever detect God. This argument, unfortunately vividly reflects the image of an Emperor with no Clothes.³

The final area that Mann has selected to consider in his treatment of "What difference would God's existence make to the world and its inhabitants?" is in the area of morality. How has God affected our morality? If it is God who defines what is true and the nature of what we deem to be true, then his project is salvaged. For this Mann elects to examine morality through the lens of rule-utilitarianism and then compare it to theistic morality. In doing so, he suggests that we are not really moral by nature but are prone to act morally in the interests of societal cohesion. Conversely, it is the morality we are given by God, the morality of the Ten Commandments and other Christian teachings that guide us not because they are useful but because they have been divined to us by God. Mann ultimately dismisses normative ethics, in general, for requiring a library-like memory to learn from the past and understand what is normal and rule-utilitarianism, specifically, for its dependence on human cognition to comprehend the full spectrum of variable to determine what is to be, conclusively, in the collective best interest.

With such glaring exceptions and loop-holes through which morality might elide – the loop-holes being the weakness and constraints of the theories themselves, Mann suggests our concept of morality is written in the *Exodus* and the *Ten Commandments* – which are obligatory because God declares them to be so (p. 236). So, according to this, God has made the rules and in doing so has created what we perceive to be morality. In this respect, it is clear that God has had a tremendous influence on morality in the human condition.

At a first glance, this poses a difficulty for all the obvious reasons that the various divine command theories have not made it to the ethical mainstream. For example, one could easily imagine that there was morality before the Ten Commandments and that the Bible contains in a written form what was already in existence. More concretely, my problem is certainly not with the belief in God, but rather with the fact that should one set out to determine God's influence on morality, as Mann does, one has to at least make an attempt to identify that it is, indeed, God that is having

3. Emperor's New Clothes refers to a 1837 Hans Christian Anderson fable. Often referred to when people have been falsely induced into believing something out of fear of questioning the obvious.

the said influence. As far as I am concerned, there are only three original moral lessons that come out of the Ten Commandments, namely, I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have any strange gods before Me; Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; and, Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. The rest of the teachings of the Ten Commandments could easily be taken to be common-sense principles by which we, as political animals, live together and are able to maintain peace and good social order.

In *God, Modality and Morality*, William Mann sets out to determine what difference God's existence makes to humanity. In my view, his approach renders this project ineffective. He does his project a disservice by not only assuming that God exists but by outright ignoring those who might think otherwise. His work might appeal to the like-minded individuals but it seems to me that if the goal of academic writing is to reach a broader audience than one's direct peers, then Mann's book fails to do so. If he was not trying to convince the skeptics, then why bother with the work at all?

Perhaps the religious amongst us are tired of the patrimony of intelligentsia – but that is better than an outright scholarly attack meant to draw antagonistic responses. Much like the Wizard of Oz, once we start pulling back the layers of theology and religion in an effort to legitimize it, the essence is lost. It appears to me that by having no sound logic to his argument, Mann has woken up the sleeping dog and challenged those of us who have been happy to leave theology in peace.

Donald McFARLING

*Graduate Studies – Philosophy
Dominican University College
Ottawa*

Colbert RHODES (ed.), **Renewal: The Inclusion of Integralism and Moral Values into the Social Sciences**, Lanham MD, Hamilton Books, 2017, 246 p., ISBN 978-0-7618-6941-2.

The title of this edited volume of essays might hinder it somewhat from finding its true audience, so it is worthwhile beginning this review by clarifying what this book is about. The title refers to an epistemological theory worked out in the early-to-mid 20th Century by the Russian emigré and first chair of Harvard University's Department of Sociology, Pitirim A. Sorokin. It has no meaningful connection with the Catholic Integralist movement that began in the late 19th Century, and which in that context is sometimes used to mean a sort of fundamentalism. Rather, the term "integralism," as it is used by the scholars in this volume, is Sorokin's own, likely (but not explicitly) derived at least in part from Vladimir Solovyov's concept of "integral knowledge," a way of knowing the world in contradistinction from positivism. In Sorokin's sense, it is not likely to be widely understood, and the title of the book, as it stands, needs more explanation. The book contains a fairly complete picture of Sorokin's ideas throughout the essays, but the elements of that picture are scattered throughout the volume and would benefit from the reader already having made an acquaintance with at least one of Sorokin's later works.

Sorokin published a vast body of work during his career (p. 43). Much of his earlier work consisted of sociological topics such as rural society or the effects of famine on human societies. Later, after receiving the chair at Harvard, he undertook a sweeping historical study attempting to understand the dynamics of social change, with a focus on the Western world from the Classical age until the present. His conclusion was that human societies were organized around systems of ideas, and his contribution was to highlight that these systems tended to coalesce and become integrated around ways of seeing the world. The main opposing types around which societies coalesced were, on the one hand, one that held a view of reality based on truth as evidenced by the senses, called by Sorokin "Sensate" cultures; and, on the other hand, one whose view of reality held that the senses deceive, and the truth was considered that which comes to the perceiver via mystical revelation or "supersensory" and "suprarational" intuition, which Sorokin called "Ideational." Each one of these cultural types will tend to favour a certain view of scientific truth, a certain concept of space and time, and furthermore of morals, of art, religion, ethics, law, and other social institutions. These two types can be thought of as "poles" on a scale of tendencies. No society that exists or has existed in reality would completely conform to either of these types. There will often be outliers in these various realms of cultural and social belief and activity. Sorokin's contribution could be thought of as seeing, through his study of history, that certain cultural elements "go together," or, to use Sorokin's term, are "logically and meaningfully integrated" (p. 25). There are myriad variations of societies between the "Sensate" and "Ideational"; Sorokin calls these "mixed." For Sorokin these were not meaningfully integrated. But there is one cultural supersystem that falls in the middle of the spectrum, that Sorokin felt integrated the truth of the senses and the truth of faith, together with a rational truth based on the operation of the intellect. This he named the "Idealistic" supersystem. Later in his career he began to refer to this same supersystem as "Integral." Examples of cultures which came close to "idealistic" or "integral" in Western history included the Classical period, epitomized by the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle; and also the High Middle Ages, which produced the systems of Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas. But this is not the only way that Sorokin uses the term "integralism." As mentioned earlier, Sorokin's integralism is foremost a theory of knowledge, and not merely a historical type. The way Sorokin puts it, it is a view that sees "total reality as the infinite X of numberless quantities and qualities: spiritual and material, momentary and eternal [...] spatial and spaceless, one and many [...] the *coincidentia oppositorum*."¹ This quote puts the idea of Sorokin's integralism into a rather different light, inspired by Nicholas of Cusa, and, it would seem, Schelling and Solovyov. Elsewhere Sorokin refers to the total reality as the "Infinite Manifold,"² which recalls Solovyov's conception of omniunity (*vseedinstvo*, variously translated into English over the years as "pan-unity," "all-unity" or "total-unity").

1. Pitirim A. SOROKIN, "Integralism is My Philosophy" in Whit BURNETT (ed.), *This Is My Philosophy*, New York NY, The Citadel Press, 1957.

2. Pitirim A. SOROKIN, *The Reconstruction of Humanity*, Boston MA, The Beacon Press, 1948, p.154.

In sum, the “integralism” that Sorokin developed was, foremost, an epistemological claim: that the totality of reality is an infinite, multivariate Absolute, and that it can be known in its various aspects by three kinds of intuition: sensible, rational and supersensory or “mystical.” Any one of these three forms of intuition is insufficient to the task of knowing reality. This postulate served as the grain from which Sorokin’s theory of cultural dynamics grew. Cultures, at various times in their history, construct themselves primarily around one of these ways of seeing the world. From these world-views, they derive their ends. So, in a purely Sensate culture, only that which can be empirically verified has true value. Materialism becomes the primary way of interpreting the physical world. Hedonism and utilitarianism become the main ethical system. Art and music serve to stimulate the senses of the audience. Society is made up of individuals who are bound together only by contract. Individuals’ wants are perpetually greater than their means. But eventually, the truth of the senses is found to be insufficient for society to continue functioning. The new reality dawns in the form of a cathartic crisis, where social values undergo what Sorokin sees as a transition from one “phase” to another.³

The implication of Sorokin’s theory is that in an age predominantly characterized by one or other sociocultural supersystem, there may exist other cultural currents, ethical systems, worldviews or philosophies, but their staying in power in an environment of an incompatible supersystem may not be as strong or their influence may not be as widespread as it could have been under another supersystem. So, for example, Sorokin might have come to the conclusion that one reason why British Idealism did not dominate the intellectual landscape longer might have been that nineteenth century British society and culture was characterized primarily by the Sensate mode of life, where materialist philosophies would be more compatible. The authors of the book seem to share the view that all of the dominant social and cultural trends of our time are compatible with the Sensate supersystem. Indeed, they feel that the social sciences exhibit this tendency and are therefore detached from important aspects of reality that our contemporary society does not value as highly as might have been the case in the past.

It would, therefore, seem as though that this volume on Integralism would have a clear enough concept around which it might organize itself, after an exposition in an early chapter. The book attempts to follow this structure, with an opening essay by Colbert Rhodes on “The Major Themes of Integralism and their Influence on the Thought of the Contributors,” followed by a chapter by Rhodes on “The Promise of Integralism.” Here, Sorokin’s main ideas are developed in some detail, but the issue of how the work “integralism” might be understood by a large portion of the book’s intended audience is not dealt with, which may leave some readers who are not familiar with Sorokin’s ideas confused. Also, Rhodes, in his essay, imputes a doctrine to Sorokin that only Integralism can “end the historical cycles experienced by the super sociocultural systems” (p. 31). This is inaccurate, and the citation does not support the idea that Sorokin promoted integralism to end the cycles of history. Throughout his career, Sorokin remained skeptical of linear theories of history, i.e.

3. Pitirim A. SOROKIN, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, Volume 4: *Basic Problems, Principles, and Methods*, New York NY, American Book Company, 1941, p. 764.

that history is progressing towards one end. Sorokin is open to criticism here, as he seems to promote the integral socio-cultural supersystem as the closest to the reaching of the truth, and therefore, on his theory of cycles, less susceptible to being overturned. But Sorokin never actually articulates this conclusion. Instead, for him, the Idealistic (sometimes called "Integral") socio-cultural system eventually tends to give way to the Sensate, as it did at the beginning of the Renaissance. Indeed, one of the main weaknesses of Sorokin's theory is a confusion between what appears to be a rationalistic worldview and the integral worldview. The rationalistic worldview is founded on "intellectual intuition" alone – as opposed to the sensate worldview based on "sensory intuition" or the idealational worldview based on "suprarational" or "mystical" intuition – in certain descriptions of the dynamics of socio-cultural supersystems. The integral worldview, in contrast, combines sensory, intellectual and mystical intuitions. The chapter might have done better in trying to deal with this particular confusion and weakness.

As the late Barry V. Johnston indicates in his chapter on "Integralism, Altruism and Emancipation," however, Sorokin's view was, indeed, that an integral worldview is necessary to improve human well-being. If theorizing from the point of view of an integralist epistemology and theory of socio-cultural dynamics marked an important turning point in Sorokin's career, so did his establishment of the Center for Creative Altruism after he left his chair at Harvard. Johnston in his paper expresses the view that Sorokin's position on the need to reconsider the dominant epistemology of modern society in the hope of encouraging more prosocial behaviour and outcomes is concordant with the views of Pope John Paul II. Lawrence T. Nichols also makes reference to Catholic teachings in his paper "Integralism and Positive Psychology," comparing the theories of Sorokin and Martin T. Seligman. Vincent Jeffries, in his chapter on "Foundational Ideas for an Integral Social Science in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas" suggests that Sorokin was likely inspired by knowledge of the teaching of Aquinas. It is certain that Sorokin was very familiar with the works of Aquinas and makes reference to Aquinas throughout his works, and also views Aquinas' philosophy as a prime example of the "idealistic" or "integral" socio-cultural super-system that he believed was predominant in Europe during the late Middle Ages. It is less certain, however, that Sorokin's inspiration for integralism came from Aquinas, especially given the similarities with Solovyov's theory in both nomenclature and outlook that we have noted above. Nonetheless, Jeffries, Lawrence and Johnston, between them, make a compelling case for Catholic social scientists to look closely at Sorokin's legacy. Their arguments are cogent and clear. These three authors continue in other chapters to describe specific domains where they feel that Sorokin's work can be successfully applied: Jeffries, for example, sees integralism and an emphasis on altruistic love as a fruitful direction in family studies. Johnston has an essay exploring the reasons why Sorokin's integralism did not catch on as an established school in American sociology and suggests lessons from which Catholic social science might benefit in order to effect a renewal.

The chapter by Stephen Sharkey examines the possibility of using Sorokin's approach to overcome some of the limitations to sociologist C. Wright Mills' refusal to integrate spiritual values into sociological method. The paper by Ryan Barilleaux writes more generally about the need to restore moral values in political science and

is the sole chapter that does not address Sorokin at all. But given the fact that integralism, in Sorokin's definition of the term, is a metaphysical standpoint that is at odds with the prevailing metaphysical foundations of modern society and the social sciences as part of that society, the authors and editor would have done well to explain more clearly what is implied by the book title's stated goal of "the inclusion of integralism and moral values into the social sciences."

While this book, anthology as it is, would have benefitted from a clearer focal point and perhaps some more new work better explaining Sorokin's approach to new audiences, it is nonetheless successful in drawing attention to Sorokin and may inspire more reading of some of the once-famous sociologist's middle- to late-career works. There are many trends in social thought that question the predominant worldview on which many aspects of contemporary "Western" or globalized culture seem to be based. Sorokin's epistemological integralism is a theory that social scientists and philosophers alike would do well to become familiar with, and the book can serve as a useful entry-point into his vast body of work.

Frederick MATERN

*Independent Scholar
Ottawa*

THÉOLOGIE

Daniel MARGUERAT, *Les Actes des apôtres (1-12)* (« Commentaire du Nouveau Testament », 5a), 2^e édition, Genève, Labor et Fides, 2015, 17,5 x 23,5 cm, 446 p., ISBN 978-2-8309-1229-6; *Les Actes des apôtres (13-28)* (« Commentaire du Nouveau Testament », 5b), Genève, Labor et Fides, 2015, 17,5 x 23,5 cm, 394 p., ISBN 978-2-8309-1568-6.

Daniel MARGUERAT, *L'historien de Dieu. Luc et les Actes des apôtres*, Paris, Bayard; Genève, Labor et Fides, 2018, 14,5 x 19 cm, 444 p., ISBN 978-2-227-49384-1 et 978-2-8309-1661-4.

Daniel MARGUERAT, *Jésus et Matthieu. À la recherche du Jésus de l'histoire* (« Le Monde de la Bible », 70). Paris, Bayard; Genève, Labor et Fides, 2016, 14,8 x 22,8 cm, 312 p., ISBN 978-2-227-48842-7 et 978-2-8309-1589-1.

Le chapitre 2 du second ouvrage mentionné retrace l'évolution qu'a connue depuis le 19^e siècle la recherche sur l'historiographie lucanienne dont témoignent les Actes des apôtres. Après avoir évoqué le jugement très critique qui s'est maintenu dans une certaine exégèse protestante allemande, depuis Franz Overbeck (1870) jusqu'à Gerd Lüdemann (1987), il rend compte du tournant que devaient connaître par ailleurs, autour des années 1950, les études lucaniennes, sous l'impulsion des travaux novateurs de Henry Cadbury et de Martin Dibelius parus vers le premier quart du 20^e siècle. Il souligne en particulier «dans l'ère (*sic*, manifestement par distraction dans un ouvrage aussi soigné) francophone des recherches fécondes», menées notamment par Jacques Dupont (p. 36). C'est à la grande entreprise de ce dernier que fait

penser aujourd’hui celle de Daniel Marguerat. Après avoir traduit et annoté le livre des Actes dès la première édition de la Bible de Jérusalem en fascicules (1953), Dupont avait fait paraître en 1967 le recueil classique des *Études sur les Actes des Apôtres* puis en 1984 celui des *Nouvelles études sur les Actes des Apôtres*.

De même, après avoir publié en 1999 sous le titre *La première histoire du christianisme*¹ un premier recueil d’études, suivi en 2007 (2^e éd. 2015) du commentaire des chapitres 1-12 des Actes, puis en 2015 de celui des chapitres 13-28, Daniel Marguerat vient de faire paraître en 2018, un second recueil sous le titre *L'historien de Dieu. Luc et les Actes des apôtres*. Nous avons ainsi la chance de bénéficier en langue française du relais, sur plus de deux générations, d’œuvres magistrales et très documentées reflétant soixante-cinq ans de recherche sur les Actes.

La plupart des treize études reproduites dans *La première histoire du christianisme* avaient été publiés entre 1989 et 1999. Les dix-sept que regroupe *L'historien de Dieu* en trois parties (« Histoire et théologie »; « En suivant Luc-Actes »; « Paul selon Luc ») l’ont été dans différentes revues et ouvrages collectifs entre 2003 et 2018, à l’exception d’un inédit, devenu le chapitre 11 (« L’évangélisation dans les Actes »). L’ensemble est suivi d’un index des auteurs anciens et d’un index biblique, où les références respectives à Luc et aux Actes occupent pas moins de trois et neuf des dix-sept pages (385-401); le tout s’achève par une copieuse bibliographie générale sur les deux livres de Luc. Le lecteur sera heureux de retrouver dans ce recueil des traits caractéristiques des deux volumes du commentaire: pensée claire et bien articulée, écriture élégante et agréable à lire, exploitation combinée de la critique historique classique et de l’analyse narrative, souci de concision et de synthèse, connaissance fouillée de la recherche. « Peut-on être à la fois historien et théologien ? »: sur cette question fondamentale formulée dès l’avant-propos en rapport avec l’entreprise de Luc, l’A. dévoile ses couleurs d’entrée de jeu: « Il ne manque pas, aujourd’hui comme hier, d’historiens et d’exégètes pour répondre par la négative. Ce livre prend le contrepied. M’appuyant sur les travaux récents en épistémologie de l’histoire, je plaide pour une reconnaissance de la subjectivité de tout geste historiographique. Je plaide pour le droit à une lecture théologique de l’histoire, qui n’épuise pas le sens des événements, mais participe à la pluralité signifiante du vécu humain. » (9-10)

Le prolifique exégète suisse, tout en étant attelé depuis trente ans à l’approfondissement de Lc-Ac, ne s’y tient pas cantonné pour autant. En témoigne, parmi bien d’autres travaux de type scientifique ou de vulgarisation produits durant la même période, cet autre recueil de treize études – et d’une prédication – portant sur le Jésus de l’histoire et sur l’évangile de Matthieu, publiées antérieurement, pour dix d’entre elles, entre 2002 et 2013. Chaque série comprend deux inédits: la première, « Jésus, maître de sagesse » (13-28) et « Images de Dieu: Jésus, Paul et Jean » (109-123); la seconde, « Éloge de la douceur. « Heureux les doux, car ils hériteront la terre » (Mt 5,5) » (247-267) et « Joseph, ou l’oubli du père. Prédication sur Mt 1,18-25 » (269-272). On y retrouve le même alliage de critique historique et de narratologie, « auscultation diachronique du texte et regard synchronique » (p. 159). S’avère particulièrement intéressante la première des études sur Matthieu (127-143), à la fois « le plus juif juif

1. *La première histoire du christianisme (Les Actes des apôtres)* (« Lectio divina », 180). Paris, Cerf; Genève, Labor et Fides, 1999.

des évangiles» et «le plus rude à l'égard du judaïsme» (129), ou «le plus juif et le plus antijuif des évangiles» (146). Sur la question discutée du lieu d'origine du premier évangile, l'A., dans un premier texte rédigé en 2008, paraît considérer comme acquise l'hypothèse d'Antioche de Syrie (131) – le texte suivant, rédigé quatre ans plus tard, introduit un «vraisemblablement» (142). Le mélange de forte imprégnation juive et de tension avec le judaïsme qui caractérise Mt s'expliquerait bien par ce que l'on peut connaître du milieu antiochen et du rapport de proximité qu'y entretenaient l'Église et la Synagogue. Il faut encore signaler, en finale du chapitre 10 (198-200) une synthèse bien ramassée sur le thème matthéen du jugement, objet de la thèse de docto-
rat qui allait devenir en 1981 la toute première publication de l'A². On soupçonne que la rédaction, apparemment toute simple, d'un condensé aussi dense, trahit en réalité un investissement assidu et généreux de près de quarante ans, dont peut se réjouir tout particulièrement l'exégèse de langue française.

Michel GOURGUES, o.p.

Faculté de théologie
Collège universitaire dominicain
Ottawa

Catherine VIALLE, Bénédicte DRAILLARD (dir.), *L'arbre* («Ce que dit la Bible sur...»).

Bruyères-le-Châtel, Nouvelle Cité, 2016, 11,5 cm x 18 cm, 124 p., ISBN 978-285-313-8505.

Fruit d'une approche originale, la collection *Ce que dit la Bible sur...* propose un parcours d'enseignements bibliques riches et accessibles à tous et à toutes. Cette collection qui compte vingt-trois titres au total, est dirigée par Bénédicte Draillard, juge d'instruction au tribunal ecclésiastique et aussi journaliste chez RCF (Radio Catholique de France) à Lyon. Chacun des livres se présente sous la forme d'un dialogue entre la directrice et un ou une bibliste d'une confession chrétienne ou l'autre et offre aux lecteurs une plongée au cœur de différents thèmes bibliques.

Dans cette courte monographie qui compte 124 pages et se divise en douze parties, Bénédicte Draillard rencontre Catherine Vialle, professeure d'exégèse à l'Université catholique de Lille, qui nous invite à «une promenade à l'ombre de ces arbres et à la découverte – risquée? – de leurs fruits» (p. 6).

Dès les premières pages, le parcours nous ramène loin dans le temps avec les récits des origines de plusieurs cultures où la figure de *l'arbre* est souvent «considérée comme un symbole de vie, de fertilité cosmique et, la plupart du temps, liée à une divinité féminine» (p. 6). Catherine Vialle explique comment cette symbolique de la divinité et de la fécondité de l'arbre est reprise dans le récit du paradis terrestre au livre de la Genèse, «en l'associant au Dieu désormais unique d'Israël» (p. 23).

Dans un deuxième temps, différentes significations et interprétations possibles de la figure de l'arbre dans l'univers des textes bibliques sont explorées. En revisitant

2. *Le jugement dans l'évangile de Matthieu* («Le Monde de la Bible», 6), Genève, Labor et Fides, 1981.

plusieurs événements importants de l'histoire du peuple de Dieu ou l'expérience de certains personnages marquants, Mme Vialle montre comment l'arbre, référence fondamentale à la compréhension du concept de l'alliance, est alors plus qu'une clé de lecture, puisqu'il devient le signe par excellence du lien entre Dieu et l'humanité. Les multiples sens donnés à la figure de l'arbre, qui sont autant de manières d'exprimer l'une ou l'autre dimension du rapport entre Dieu et son peuple ou l'expérience croyante de la personne, sont ainsi tour à tour examinés.

Par exemple, la figure de l'arbre prend parfois valeur de *lieu du sage* où celui-ci se met à l'écoute des Écritures et y découvre «le chemin d'accès à Dieu» (p. 44). À d'autres moments, l'arbre a valeur de *lieu du juste*, que les textes présentent *sous* un arbre, comme dans les cas de Nathanaël (Jn 1,48), Débora (Jg 4,5) et Abraham (Gn 18,1). Mais l'arbre est aussi pour d'autres, comme Moïse (Ex 3) et le prophète Jérémie (Jr 1), le *lieu de l'appel*, du choix et de grandes vocations. En d'autres occasions, la figure de l'arbre se trouve au cœur de rencontres tout à fait inattendues, comme ce fut le cas pour Zachée avec Jésus (Lc 19,1-10).

Les références et les observations ne manquent pas pour expliquer que parfois ce sont les caractéristiques propres de l'arbre qui ont valeur de signifiants. On parle alors de sa force, son caractère nourricier évoquant la présence de Dieu qui fortifie le croyant et le relève. De même, sa grande taille et sa solidité pour évoquer la royauté. Un arbre florissant représente la vie reçue en abondance, dont les fruits comptent comme autant de bénédictions divines. À l'inverse, l'arbre desséché est le signe d'*«une malédiction de Dieu»* (Dt 21,22-23) (p. 115). Et pour ceux qui trouvent la mort au bois de l'arbre, pendus ou autrement, il s'agit bien d'un châtiment. Cela permet de mieux saisir pourquoi «pour les juifs il est impossible d'accepter un messie crucifié» (p. 116) sur «l'arbre» de la croix. Cette interprétation gagne «une certaine importance quand il s'agit de comprendre l'arrière-plan de la crucifixion de Jésus» (p. 113). Et de comprendre aussi le profond questionnement des premières communautés chrétiennes face à ce supplice. Paul est d'ailleurs celui qui, le premier, «jette les bases d'une interprétation positive de la croix» (p. 117). Malheureusement, cette relecture riche et profonde du mystère de la Croix est peut-être traitée trop brièvement dans le dernier chapitre du volume.

Avec son approche méthodique, Catherine Vialle déploie tout un univers de sens lié à la figure de l'arbre dans le monde biblique. À travers son discours, à la fois instructif et ressourçant, se tisse devant les yeux du lecteur la toile d'un «véritable résumé de toute l'histoire du Salut telle qu'on la trouve dans l'Écriture [et qui véritablement] peut se faire à partir de l'arbre» (p. 122). C'est ainsi que se trouve balisé ce parcours à l'ombre des arbres. Il appartient maintenant à chacun et chacune de poursuivre sa propre route afin d'en récolter les fruits.

Frédéric TREMBLAY

*Institut de formation théologique et pastorale
Diocèse de Chicoutimi*

Unn FALKEID, **The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena**, Cambridge MA - London, Harvard University Press, 2017, 269 p., ISBN 978-0-67497-184-4.

Unn Falkeid is Associate Professor of History of Ideas at the University of Oslo. In this excellent book, she offers a great contribution to the study of six thinkers from the fourteenth century, who developed their theories in light of the most important political event of their times: the Avignon papacy. Thus, Falkeid masterfully brings together the works of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Marsilius of Padua (ca. 1275-ca. 1342), William of Ockham (ca. 1287-ca. 1347), Francis Petrarch (1304-1374), Birgitta of Sweden (1303-1373), and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380). Even though there are two forerunners of Humanism, two men branded as heretics, and two women considered to be saints within the group, Falkeid shows how all of them share political resistance to the Avignon papacy, which had gone unnoticed in previous scholarship. At the same time, Falkeid's contribution is a proof that political thought is found in far more varied ways than traditionally assumed. Sometimes, histories of political theory have failed in pointing out the connection between historical events and the political theories that engage with those events. Falkeid escapes this danger by offering a valuable methodological insight, emphasizing that we cannot separate the theory from its historical context. In this case, the context that motivated the innovative solutions offered by the historical figures discussed in the book was a specific political and ecclesiastical crisis of their time, namely, the Avignon papacy.

From 1309 to 1377, the pope and the Roman curia resided in the city of Avignon in Southern France. The period was also marked by an extraordinary process of centralization of the Roman church. Since Pope Gregory VII's series of reforms from the 11th Century, designed to free the church from lay control and increase the central, administrative power of the papacy, the popes had assumed moral leadership of Christendom, strongly supported by the canonists of the 13th Century who defended the pope's supremacy. This process of centralization intensified in the 14th Century, especially in an attempt to prevent secular states from appropriating church revenues without the pope's permission. In 1302, Pope Boniface VIII confronted his opponents with his bull *Unam Sanctum*, the most extreme assertion of the pontiff's political and juridical primacy over secular rulers that had ever been promulgated. In 1305, Pope Clement V was crowned in the presence of King Philip in Poitiers in France, and soon after he settled in Avignon. The following six popes resided there as well, marking a period in which the papacy grew in authority and wealth, and became the most powerful and prosperous court in Europe. This rise of the papal curia aroused mixed reactions, which set the historical stage for the work of the authors presented in the book.

Each chapter of *The Avignon Papacy Contested* presents in a masterful way a case study showing how these six characters questioned the legitimacy of the pope's secular power while appealing for a profound reformation of the church.

In Chapter One, Falkeid uncovers Dante's conviction that only a secular emperor with unlimited temporal power could create peace and bring universal liberty to the citizens. She also identifies within Dante's *Commedia* his political letters and his treatise *Monarchia*, a sophisticated argument for the separation of church and state, which implied a complete transfer of secular power to the emperor, leaving spiritual

matters under the jurisdiction of the pope. This was, for Dante, the precondition for establishing peace.

In Chapter Two, Falkeid compares Dante's *Inferno* and *Monarchia* with Marsilius of Padua's treatise *Defensor Pacis*, in order to show how both authors differed greatly in their interpretations of legitimate authority. For Dante, both secular and ecclesiastical power had a divine origin. Marsilius, on the contrary, emphasized the unrestricted power and freedom of citizens to elect their ruler, so that authority rested on the authority of the body of citizens. In doing so, Marsilius delimited the pope's power strictly to religious affairs.

Marsilius's theory of citizen agency found richer expression in William of Ockham's philosophy of subjective rights and individual freedom, which is presented in Chapter Three. In Ockham's *Breviloquium*, the main focus is the fundamental liberty granted to all human beings by both divine and natural rights. Thus, Ockham labeled the pope's theocratic claims to supremacy as heretic.

In Chapter Four, Falkeid presents Petrarch's call for a return to the glorious culture of the classical past. He argued that Rome was the only ground for legitimate authority, and that, as a consequence, the move to Avignon meant a perversion of authority according to both divine and natural laws.

In the last two chapters, Falkeid presents what we have been labelled as the "political thought" of Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena. In Birgitta's visions and in Catherine's *Dialogo*, as well as in the multiple letters they both addressed to different popes, there is enough material to outline a theory of papal ethics and church governance. They both claim that Rome is the spiritual capital of Christendom, and that in order to reform the church as an ecclesiastical institution the pope had to return to Rome, for that is where the legitimacy of his power was to be found. For both of them, the stay at Avignon was illegitimate in and of itself.

To conclude my review, I would like to highlight Falkeid's contribution to bringing together these six authors who did, in fact, have a significant influence on the political events of their time, and whose works have hardly been explored in the context of the Avignon papacy. All of them were united by responding in their own creative way to the implications of the Avignon papacy, and by sharing a concern for the breakdown of the secular order implied by the expansion of papal power. At the same time, Falkeid gives a long overdue credit to the indisputable contributions by Petrarch, Birgitta of Sweden, and Catherine of Siena to contemporary intellectual and political debates. Falkeid effectively warns against "narrow-minded definitions of what a political 'thinker' or 'philosopher' is" (p. 8). Finally, Falkeid opens new frontiers of scholarship and research by pointing out that the literary work of these six authors not only dominated the agenda of the contemporary political and intellectual debates, but had far-reaching effects for the political discourses of early modern Europe. What is even more, what influence the work of Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena had on political thought, the Renaissance, the reform movements, and on humanists, poets, and writers, is still an uncharted territory calling for further exploration.

Pablo M. ITURRIETA

Graduate Studies – Philosophy
Dominican University College
Ottawa

LIVRES REÇUS

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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

vol. 70 (2018)

ARTICLES

ALLARD, M. et RIOUX-BEAULNE, M.	Liminaire: Actuel, Malebranche?	1-2
APOSTOLOVA, I.	Compassion for the Animals. Is It Enough?	181-194
ANDUJAR, E.	Le plaidoyer de Francisco de Vitoria. Une compassion à visage de philosophie politique	195-203
BERGO, B.	Schelling, Theodicy and Evil	303-315
BRENCIO, F.	Patways Across Darkness. Contemporary Evil and the Task of Philosophy	381-392
BURBIDGE, J. W.	Absolute Evil. Reflections on Hegel's Philosophy	317-324
CAENEPEEL, D.	La logique de la miséricorde dans le discernement moral et pastoral	167-179
CHAMPAGNE, É.	Les mains de la miséricorde. Éléments d'une spiritualité agissante	153-165
CHUKURIAN, A.	La conception malebranchiste de l'idée en question: Infidélité à Descartes et supériorité ontologique du monde intelligible	3-17
DABROWSKI, A.	L'appel à Thomas d'Aquin dans la polémique Arnauld-Malebranche	19-28
DUHAMEL, A.	«Evil Does Exist in the World»	407-421
FIASSE, G.	La conception éthique et politique du mal chez Paul Ricoeur. Conséquences pratiques à l'aune du contexte contemporain	363-379
FOURNIER, M.	Les métamorphoses de la «folle du logis»: enjeux de la référence à Malebranche dans le discours contemporain sur l'imaginaire	29-40
GOURGUES, M.	La miséricorde en trois temps: le témoignage de Luc	139-152
HUNTER, H.	Malebranche, Berkeley and the Path to Idealism	41-50
LIZOTTE, S.	La place de la raison et de la foi dans la morale malebranchiste	51-65
MADORE, J. et THIBODEAU, M.	Liminaire. Le mal après Kant	281-285

MADORE, J.	La volonté diabolique. Kant, Bizot et le Khmers rouges	393-406
MALINOWSKI-CHARLES, S.	La question de l'amour de soi chez Malebranche et la querelle sur le pur amour de Dieu	67-80
ORANLI, İ.	Evil's Inscrutability in Arendt and Levinas	341-362
RIOUX-BEAULNE, M. et ALLARD, M.	Liminaire: Actuel, Malebranche?	1-2
RIOUX-BEAULNE, M.	Fontenelle, Malebranche et les limites de la philosophie	81-99
SARES, J.	Evil and the Absolute. The Paradox of the Future in Schelling's <i>Freiheitsschrift</i>	287-302
SWEET, W.	Forgotten Philosophies	205-229
THIBODEAU, M. et MADORE, J.	Liminaire. Le mal après Kant	281-285
THIBODEAU, M.	Hegel, Kant et le problème du mal	325-339

REVUES CRITIQUES

DOUTRE, J.	L'Écriture en échos	241-251
MICHAUD, J.-P.	La Galilée de Jésus. Le <i>chant du cygne</i> de Séan Freyne	231-239
PERRON-NAULT, S.	Sur l'émergence de la <i>high christology</i>	101-107

RECENSIONS ET COMPTES RENDUS

Philosophie

BLAHUTA, J. P.	<i>Fortune and the Dao: A Comparative Study of Machiavelli, the Daodejing, and the Han Feizi</i> (Marie Antonios Sassine)	265-266
CASALINI, C.	<i>Aristotle in Coimbra. The Cursus Conimbricensis and the Education at the College of Arts</i> (Graeme Hunter)	253-256
DELSOL, C. et STEFFENS, M.	<i>Le nouvel âge des pères</i> (Félix Gauthier-Mamaril)	113-114
DENNNETT, D. C.	<i>From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds</i> (Matthew Newland)	109-112
DERENNE, J.	<i>Recherches arnaldiennes</i> , Tome I: <i>Théorie raisonnée des idées chez Antoine Arnauld: reprise et prolongement du projet cartésien</i> (Graeme Hunter)	257-259
LAURENDEAU, P.	<i>Des enfants pensent l'avenir. Philosophie pour enfants et prévention de la violence</i> (Elaine Champagne)	266-267
MANN, W. E.	<i>God, Modality, and Morality</i> (Donald McFarling)	423-427

- MULNIX, J. W. *Happy Lives, Good Lives: A Philosophical Examination* 114-116
and MULNIX, M. J. (Renze NAUTA)
- PEDDLE, F. K. *The Annotated Works of Henry George*, Volume II, 259-261
and PEIRCE, W. S. *Progress and Poverty* (Brendan Hennigan)
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