

# Study on Ontology of Evil

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*As people's shadow — invulnerable evil is*

*J. Brodsky. The March*

**Abstract**—This paper is dedicated to the analysis of the place and role of evil in a human life, in society and culture. The authors put into the spotlight some aspects of the phenomenon of evil, previously overlooked by the philosophers. Among those aspects, the idea of the inevitability and necessity of evil in culture, the idea of evil as a transitional stage to moral life, and the idea of the transcendent foundations of evil.

**Keywords**—evil; good; freedom; suffering; ordinary and tragic morality

## I. INTRODUCTION

The philosophical study of culture involves going beyond the cultural framework towards the basic phenomena of human existence: love, creativity, faith, death, good and evil, etc. These phenomena do not depend on a particular form of culture. Love, although coming in many forms, still remains love, not needing any explanations despite the other cultures. On the contrary, love itself determines the cultural development and makes its study possible. So is evil: whatever form it takes, from an insult to a murder, evil is everything, bringing harm, suffering, and death to a person.

Unlike love, good, and conscience, evil is the most mysterious and paradoxical kind of human existence. Love and conscience, e.g., have no reason — you love because of love and you do the right thing because you can't do otherwise. More precisely, there's a reason, however, it is not natural but supernatural, not determined by empirical circumstances. Evil always has a specific cause. Evil is ontological (existential) compared to good, having only an axiological nature (value). Evil is not a lack of good. Good manifests itself where evil temporarily retreats. Good most often is missing. The inevitability of the ultimate victory of evil is especially evident in death. Death is natural from the point of view of natural processes, yet it is unnatural for a human being as a spiritual being in any phase of his existence. For people, death is always the greatest and the gravest evil.

Evil is inexorable and indestructible. It is always present in the world in the forms of terrorism, hatred of the rich towards the poor and of the poor towards the rich, national

and racial intolerance, etc. And so, apparently, will always be till the end of times.

Evil is diverse, manifold, pervasive, total and, most importantly, ordinary. If a good deed delights and surprises us, then deception, greed, avarice, violence seem just ordinary. Evil is the triumph of chaos. Chaos is much more affluent in the world than order, so it often leaves you wondering: Why does the world exist at all? What keeps it together? Is it the rare good deeds and feelings of occasional people? That is hard to believe. Maybe, the margin of safety, created by God, is large enough for the people to squander.

The power of evil increases due to its anonymity nowadays. Evil used to be personified: everything will gradually improve after we defeat Hitler or after Stalin dies. And indeed, there were improvements. There's no such hope now. Instead, there is a confidence that the small gray will be replaced by the brighter black or red, and the next "leader" will be the same evil for the people as are the emissions of a chemical factory.

In the digital age, evil has more opportunities to seep into any gap, into any crack of human relations, more ways to pretend to be good, to convince a person that good should be with fists, that enemies are all around, that the motherland is not a place of birth but something sacred, to which one should pray and love with all his might, and the non-believer is a traitor and so on. Therefore, it's necessary to ring the bells instead of listening to the mellow "Appassionata".

The problem of evil and the justification of God – these questions have long since occupied people, forcing them to argue, write books, seek an answer to one more painful question: how can there be evil if there is God [1]?

After the condemnations of evil, it is quite unnerving to find in Fyodor Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground" insights that:

- Only the internally profound people are capable of evil. The depth, bottomlessness opens under specific circumstances in a person, "released" from the law, from the cosmic order.

- It is better to endure evil and even produce it than to lose its free seductive beauty. As the world without evil, that textured shadow, would be blank and bleak, so people without the inner division, without the tragedy of existence, would be boring, bland individuals, like a key, being monotonically and persistently knocked on by a finger of fate.
- The ability to do evil and the alignment to it are the inevitable human satellites, just like the shadows.
- Often the only way to a meaningful life is a crime. Only by going through it one may become moral, only by turning to the Devil one may turn to God. This illegitimate existence reveals the deepest secret of the soul – its complexity. There’s a lot to it concealed from us. For the most part, people do not know the content of their souls and do not know the true image of the world they live in. After all, the world presents itself in all its truth to an individual, who has discovered the depth of the soul.

All these arguments sound a sharp discordance for classical humanism, glorifying reason as the guiding light of mankind, and the mean to end evil and lead society to happiness. Evil, death, suffering, from this point of view, are unnatural to people.

But if the laws of nature demanded people live in peace and harmony, and at a height of these laws lies, rudeness, violence would be considered an unnatural pathology, then a person would be sentenced to good, with it sooner or later triumphing in the world despite the resistance of obscurantists, cannibals, selfish and evil men. In time society would correct and align properly the human nature by joint efforts of its fellow citizens, timely extinguishing arising deviations. Still, for some reason, philosophers write: “Whatever man might accomplish, whatever technological, social, and intellectual improvements he might introduce into his life, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow will not differ in any fundamental way from yesterday and today in the face of the question of the meaning of life. This world will always be ruled by meaningless chance, where man is an impotent leaf of grass which can be destroyed by the heat of the sun or the storms of the earth. His life, always brief and fragmentary, will never contain the yearned-for spiritual fullness which gives meaning to life. And evil, stupidity, and blind passion will always rule on earth” [2].

Following Fyodor Dostoevsky, Semyon Frank and Nikolai Berdyaev, we would like to highlight the conditions and opportunities for justifying evil, or rather, justifying the need for its existence as an essential condition of human and his culture’s existence.

## II. EVIL IN THE INDIVIDUAL EXISTENCE

There are two types of morals — ordinary and tragic ones. A person acutely feels being sucked into everyday life with its regulations, rules, prohibitions, and laws. The laws were discovered by science and must be reckoned with and obeyed to. Even if it turns out, that according to these laws a person is just a mere piano key, following the rules of nature.

Life of a person, realizing this, is tragic in its essence: it is almost impossible to stop being a key with a person deciding to do something extraordinary to reach the new state. Sure, it is easier if there are talents and creativity is possible. And if there’s no talent, then at worst you can burn down a temple, assassinate a President or an elderly pawnbroker just to make a statement or to stop being an obedient key.

The “abnormality” of an individual, his discrepancy with social structures, his rejection of many social norms and ideals is, in fact, the norm of his authentic existence. The root of evil is in a man’s free will, and evil may only be destroyed by taking away man’s freedom.

It is better to lead a hard life, in which nothing could be calculated in advance, make mistakes, suffer, love, hate, and constantly worry about own stupidity and imperfection but still — live. “And although our life, in this manifestation of it, is often worthless, yet it is life and not simply extracting square roots” [3].

And so, probably, if a person has to choose between a world in which there is a constant peace of mind and happiness, and a world ruled by evil and foolishness, he would choose the latter, since only there something depends on him, not satisfied with “the green-pasture happiness of the herd, common to all” (F. Nietzsche), when no one asks, whether an individual is satisfied or not. As it is impossible to accept freedom as a gift but only to conquer it, so it is equally impossible to teach a person not to do evil. An individual sometimes reaches a state of spiritual enlightenment, grace and inner peace through crimes, torments, suffering, and punishment. And for this opportunity, he is ready to go against all laws, reason, honor, tranquility and prosperity. A man needs neither happiness nor prosperity if he hasn’t overwhelmed himself. “Perhaps suffering is just as great a benefit to him as well-being? Man is sometimes extraordinarily, passionately, in love with suffering, and that is a fact. There is no need to appeal to universal history to prove that; only ask yourself, if you are a man and have lived at all. As far as my personal opinion is concerned, to care only for well-being seems to me positively ill-bred. Whether it’s good or bad, it is sometimes very pleasant, too, to smash things. I hold no brief for suffering or for well-being either. I am standing for ... my caprice, and for its being guaranteed to me when necessary” [4].

The Polish sci-fi writer Stanisław Lem has a novel “Return from the Stars”. The cosmonauts return to their homeworld Earth after being 127 years absent. During their absence, the population of the Earth has undergone the Great Humanitarian revolution, receiving a shot, making everyone avert to aggression, rudeness, and violence. The eternal dream has come true – there are no more crimes or wars. Yet the cosmonauts, lacking this shot, oddly enough enjoy a huge success, as society sees in them normal, full-fledged people. The ability to do evil deeds and aggression are closely linked to talent, persistence in achieving goals, and courage with the rest looking like obedient sheep.

There are those who think in vain that the ability to do evil is an indicator of inferiority, the result of either Divine or natural defect. The ability to do evil is a gift to humanity, knocking it out from the animal state, leading to the despair and to the hope for salvation. There is no other way to salvation but through evil.

### III. EVIL IN SOCIETY

Renaissance humanism saw evil as the imperfection of the social order, and, therefore, in all ages lived and occupied an important place in the minds an utopian idea, according to which it is enough to change the being of people, to transform an imperfect society, so people would have no ground to do evil. Yet evil dwells much deeper the social dimension of an individual. God and the devil are locked in an eternal struggle for the human soul, and so the ultimate victory of good over evil is not possible. Nikolai Berdyaev wrote in 1918: "Among us they were too accustomed to put the blame on the autocracy, all the evil and darkness of our life they wanted to impute to this. But by this they cast off from themselves as Russian people the burden of responsibility and inclined themselves to irresponsibility. There is no longer the autocracy, but the Russian darkness and the Russian evil have remained. The darkness and evil are lodged down deeper, not in the social externals of the people, but in its spiritual core. There is no longer the old autocracy, but autocracy as before rules in Russia, as before there is no respect for man, for human dignity, for human rights. There is no longer the old autocracy, the old officialdom, the old police, but bribery as before is a basis of Russian life, its underlying constitution. Bribery has become more widespread, than ever. A grandiose profit is to be made off the revolution. The scenes from Gogol are being played out at every step in revolutionary Russia. There is no longer the autocracy, but as before Khlestakov pawns himself off as an important official, and as before all tremble before him. There is no longer the autocracy, but Russia as before is full of dead souls, and as before there is marketing with them" [5].

Social relations have always everywhere been built upon the basis of evil. Being kind is an art, just like being smart or noble. There's no art in being evil. If you lack the art to do well, you will inevitably do evil. Semyon Frank wrote, that if one to look at the whole life of the mankind, one paradoxical but apparent fact becomes evident: "All the sorrow and evil that reign on Earth, all streams of blood and tears, all the distress, humiliation, and suffering at least at 99% are the result of the will to implement good, of the fanatical faith in any sacred principles, which should be immediately spread, of the will to mercilessly exterminate evil; while hardly one-hundredth of evil and disasters is caused by openly evil and criminal avarice will" [6].

Centuries of spiritual and moral schooling of a person, undertaken by Christianity, by and large, led to nothing, instilled no immunity against atrocities, and the French Revolution was an explosion of an angry mob, and the 20th century, with its outstanding achievements in science and culture, turned into unprecedented crimes against humanities. The very logic of the development of human society leads to

the idea that the ultimate victory over evil is beyond human powers. Only God may grant such a power. God, therefore, is needed by people since there's evil in the world. The world without evil is not needed since it would be the godless, meaningless and hopeless world.

### IV. TRANSCENDENCY OF EVIL

There's a special kind of memory inside humans that should not be awakened and used. This is the memory of the beast, of the dark animal from which man has come and which still resides in him, sometimes breaking through the levees. Passion for murder, scorn, promiscuity, fierce anger seems to be not even natural but some kind of cosmic magic power. An animal couldn't be blamed for violence: by killing, it either procures food or protects itself. Yet here we're talking about the wild, pre-human origins that are some otherworldly, transcendent conditions for the advent of mankind.

The animal nature has always been suppressed and expelled, developed and revered simultaneously. An individual has been perceived in the folk tradition not only as a "God's creation" or a "man of God" but also as a "God's beast". The guess of the entanglement of man and beast goes back centuries. The Ancient Greeks turned God-man into God-beast. What is more to a man: animal, carnal, biological power and energy, an instinct that remembers everything needed for survival, or an unusually sharp mind, intelligence, the gift of imagination? A human becomes a human by overcoming the bestial passions and instincts; but does not he lose something equally important and deep, which is an obligatory part of his own nature?

Animal nature, aggressiveness, biological power, and energy are as natural and necessary as gentleness, compassion, meekness. Along with Anthony of Padua, Francis of Assisi, Sergius of Radonezh, Saint Christopher there were Timur, Julius Caesar, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and many other "heroes" who drowned peoples and cities in blood. In our time those "heroes" were represented by true monsters, "outstanding mediocrities" (as Leon Trotsky described Joseph Stalin) — Hitler, Mussolini, Hussein, Kim Il-sung, Gaddafi, Bokassa, and others. They tend to boast bold charisma, great energy, and yet they primarily express the "animal origins". They represent the very same Beast coming out of the abyss, as prophesized by John the Apostle in the Book of Revelation.

As Dmitry Merezhkovsky puts it, there is some inexhaustible power in this Beast, if it may rise up against Christ as the Antichrist to clash with the One "who conquered the world". There's also some terrible, obscure wisdom and knowledge in the Beast. It knows something that keeps eluding from man, something that man has forgotten and struggles to remember; a kind of night vision, clairvoyance, which we call "the scent of an animal", instinct. The Beast slumbers inside the human beings, but it may emerge someday, maybe there will be one ultimate fight between a man and the Beast, between the God-Man and the Beast [7].

All these gods, demons, beasts are in the essence the product of the ancient layers of the unconscious mind, being formed for thousands of years, coming from the depths of centuries in the form of archetypal symbols; they are transcendent to us and, as the depth psychology suggests, should be treated grave seriously, since they may storm into consciousness, extinguishing the light of reason. We only consider possessing and controlling our souls, but in fact, what is known to science as psyche and imagined as a question mark entombed in the skull, is an open gateway through which something unknown, otherworldly and incomprehensible enters our reality from time to time. And at the same time, only by gazing intently into this underworld, one can awake in self the creative power, which begets in us, according to Carl Jung, a voice louder than our own, elevating personal destiny to the fate of humanity and thus releasing in us the saving forces that have always helped to get rid of any dangers and to overcome the longest nights [8].

All the Dostoevsky's heroes — from Svidriga Iov to Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov — are pursued in their dreams or visions by the God-Beast, Tarantula God or a spider; apparently, it also was chasing after Dostoevsky himself, as if holding doom in its image. Dostoevsky must have seen the tyrants and criminals of all the last centuries. Indeed, there's something spidery about them, something frankly inhuman, as if some force is tearing through them into our world, trying to instill its own order. Watching this masquerade, one inevitably begins to feel the mystical thoughts of the ultimate battle, the Kingdom of Satan, etc. Surely, there's nothing appalling in a pock-marked, simplistic Stalin's face, and yet somehow it reflects his pitch-black soul and embodies our knowledge of the committed crimes. Probably, everyone who has directed the great energy and will not to a good cause, striking a deal with the devil in a sense, bears the seal of deep bodily fear and anger towards the whole world.

## V. CONCLUSION

A man struggles with evil, and while he struggles, he remains in the bosom of culture. The problem is not to limit or distort the meaning of human freedom while fighting evil. As freedom dies either from evil or from coercion to good, it cannot be identified with good, truth or perfection. Freedom is freedom, being exercised through both good and evil deeds. As long as there's freedom, there's evil in the world. However, we cannot give up freedom – we are condemned to it, thrown into it. Any conflux of freedom with good and perfection is a denial of freedom, recognition of coercion and violence.

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