



## THE EVIL

### What is evil?

According to Leibniz's work "Essay on the Essays on the justice of God and the freedom of man in the origin of the evil", "Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. Metaphysical evil consists in mere imperfection, physical evil in suffering, and moral evil in sin." (Theodicy, 21). Similarly, many before and after him gave such an explanation.

However, here, by developing a very brief literary, philosophical and historical tour, we are concerned with associating the word "evil" to several realities, as we do in practice: injustice, pain, suffering, illness, fear, anxiety, disgraces, losses, wickedness and malice, slaughters, oppression, wars, terrorisms, catastrophes, death and a lot more.

### Escape from the absurd

Evil, nowadays and always, is evident and absurd on this earth and in our lives. Perhaps, it is invincible.

By facing the absurdities of an invincible evil, man needs to try to escape the absurd and to try to find an explanation of evil. In many ways, both from an intellectual point of view and from a more practical and social point of view, man has been trying to unbend the absurd of the pain, suffering, illness, disgrace, wars, cataclysm, death, or in summary the evil.

For example, in manichaeism doctrine, good and evil have been conceived as two opposite ontological and equipollent principles. For the dialectical idealism, evil is a pure negative element of being which has to be exceeded towards a final and positive synthesis. Evolutionist positivism considered evil as product of the environment (by taking away the burden of responsibility, and then also the freedom of man. Same danger can be said of other doctrines which consider evil as embedded inside the limitedness of man-creature).

According to Aristotele, who considered man as a rational being by nature, happiness is a condition which can be gained by reasoning. Reasoning leads to happiness. Happiness is a mind state. According to Augustine of Hippo and to Plotino as well, evil is a sort of "privatio boni" (deprivation of good), i.e. deprivation or leak of being or good. According to Schopenhauer, being good means not being bad. Life is pain (and hoping to not suffer is meaningless. Suffering is a natural state for man, whose life is like a "pendulum which oscillates between pain and tedium"). The desire itself makes uneasiness and unhappiness, because man desires what he cannot own. Happiness consists in the temporary suspension of pain. According to Leibniz and to his self-invented "theodicy" (=doctrine of justice), this world is the best one among all possible worlds. Malebranche said that "also evil wishes our best".

According to many thoughts and visions of the world, a "post mortem" concept of happiness is present, as also in the Declaration of Independence of United States of 1775 (which stated the right of "searching the happiness", and by charging the State with guaranteeing wellbeing). Therefore, happiness has been made bureaucratic and materialistic (by imitating Scandinavian Countries, perhaps). Happiness has been brought down to a "billionaire lotto" fortune!

We could keep listing many other attempts man has been facing with the constant problem of evil, some of them astonishing or simpleminded, both personal or social.

### Evil, an opaque atom

Well, this year, to face this theme, i.e. evil and its counterpart, happiness, Tonalestate has chosen the title "For this opaque atom of evil". It has been borrowed from a poem by Giovanni Pascoli titled as "Dieci Agosto" (August the 10th), where the poet remembers a family tragedy happened exactly during the night of August the 10th. Traditionally, that night is the night of "falling stars" in Italy. From that remembrance, the poet addresses himself to "heaven", which actually is the mystery of the ultimate foundation of the being and the existence. From his highest, this mystery seems to not be interested in our daily evil and thus he/she seems to persist in his/her serenity and eternity. Thus, our lives and our land would be like "the opaque atom of the evil".

All the compassion and the answer this mystery seems to show is some sort of "crying in the form of shooting stars" of the universe and the mystery. As the poet said: "Tu d'un pianto di stelle lo inondi quest'atomo opaco del male" ("You fill this opaque atom of evil with a crying of stars"). The pleasant "falling stars" are a desperate crying against the absurd of the human evil.

### THE DIVINE INDIFFERENCE

On one hand, Pascoli's poem contains at least such a "great crying". On the other hand, in the Eugenio Montale's strophe, which is a comment to the Tonalestate's title, only a divine indifference remains. That strophe is a clear statement of the inability of the optimism of any theodicy (i.e. the defense of god) to justify the existence of a divine justice with respect to the existence of evil in the world.

In fact, if god is good, omnipotent and omniscient, why does he tolerate the physical torture, the inexpressible pains of a dying patient, the death of a helpless child, the innocent pain, oppressions, Auschwitz, wars, massacres, natural catastrophes, etcetera? How such a god can exist? A "good" god who tolerates such iniquities? Does god keep looking while all those things happen to us?

Montale's "divine indifference" is essentially a god produced by our ratio, who does not prohibit evil. If he does not because he cannot, then he is not omnipotent. If he does not because he does not want to, then that means that he is not good at all. And if he does not know how to prohibit evil, then he is not omniscient at all.

### Evil looks at us, evil is of concern

Moreover, what about the terrified eye painted by Michelangelo, and which looks at us from this year Tonalestate manifesto?

"Il nous regarde": he looks at us. "Il nous regarde": it is our concern.

It looks at our daily life (which is of concern), where often the right man has been punishing and the unjust has been awarded, where the real evildoers escape the justice, where important charges have not been covered by skilled or meritorious people, where the hope of the poor and starving people, once born as poor and starving, is nothing but receiving a life as poor and starving people.

### An initial pessimism

In ancient times, these questions have been stimulated by the Severino Boetius inquiring in his "De consolazione philosophiae": "Si Deus est, unde malum? Si Deus non est, unde bonum?". That is, if God does exist, where evil comes from? If God does not exist, where good comes from?

On the other hand, nowadays, we try to demand of ourselves which the matter of happiness is, by our limited abstract reasoning, by our pragmatic humanism. The nature of this happiness and its tangible consistency is our question.

This matter-of-fact self-awareness contained undoubtedly an effective ethical impulse. In fact, it stimulates ourselves to get involved for the future, in order to surmount, now, evil, in view of a better future for a number of people as much as possible, for a happiness as high as possible, for a more right order. On the other hand, it contains also a future utopia (both the hope of a society without classes and

that of great "shalom" of the eternal peace). That self-awareness puts happiness into the future.

Is this matter-of-fact consideration enough? Is that fair with respect to the mystery of man, the mystery of me?

Which is the meaning of the man who suffered and died yesterday? Although our engagement for the happiness of the future is right, it is meaningless to him.

Moreover, which is the meaning of the man who suffers and dies now? Which the meaning for who is unable to make any contribute (because of an illness or an external compulsion) for the future, for a better tomorrow, more free and more right?

How do we accomplish the dignity and the value of every single man?

In front of the entire evil, the pain, illness and the death, that historical and pragmatic self-understanding of man turns to be abstract.

Simplistic and positivistic optimism would view evil as a dialectical element after all, which can be overcome, because evil is a temporary event with respect to the triumphant destiny of humankind. But the daily terrible news and what happens every day to us recall to our mind the evidence of evil and pain, of injustice and suffering, of guilt and crime, which is an effective reality and unavoidable. Therefore, human condition assumes an eminent character of tragedy.

#### THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS

Given such raging of evil, the real problem is knowing whether we can achieve the good, despite the fact that there is evil, especially the nonsense universal evil of death. In summary, man is interested in knowing if true happiness is possible, by including in such acceptance the opposite of what we called as "evil": justice, health, joy, fraternity, peace, harmony with nature, goodness, freedom and much more, until the fullness of life.

Can we be happy?

Unfortunately, the pursuit of happiness never ends or is never completely accomplished. In fact, a lot of individual felicities have been offering to us, which we do not own but in one moment, which fly away from our hands. To this point, we can quote Clemente Rebora who said "everyone gras at his own good which shouts out: goodbye!"

Eventually, we remain alone with our shout, our secret question, until what is unavoidable will come, i.e. the "cold death", the "naked grave".

So, our empirical observation and reasoning lead us to definitely say "no", as Giacomo Leopardi said: Nature did give to us the desire of happiness and the need of it as well, but nature did not put within the world the answer (the happiness), and, then, man is unable to fill his desire (in other words, it sounds like a world where we are thirsty but there is not any water). This is an absurd and "human life is evil" and nature "is stepmother", not mother.

#### NO MEANING FOR EVIL

If we desist from optimism, shall we conclude our discussion by definitely saying "life is evil"? Or rather, at this point, will we have the courage to plunge our look inside the abyss of nonsense, and recognizing that we are unable to find neither sense nor explanation?

Moreover: certain expressions of evil (e.g. the final absurd death) are so absurd and disgusting and dreadful that they seem to be rooted at the the spirit of "not being" and the self-destruction (similar words can be found in the well known and powerful "The Brothers Karamzov - The Grand Inquisitor"). In front of such evil expression, we need to recognize our lack of understanding and our ignorance.

In these cases, nonsense appear as the only plausible explanation to the the huge tragedy or the absurd suffering. We feel that the only explanation is the logic based

on the casualties, and we feel that nature is nothing that chaos, an opaque chaso to human reason.

#### ON THE ETHIC OF LIMITEDNESS

Reason rejects optimism, as well as the absolute pessimism.

Although we are still under the domination of violence, injustice and hate, what we said so far makes clear that the real human figure contains both misery and greatness.

Man always overlooks everything exists, towards the infinity, the happiness and the good. And that is his greatness.

Contrary, his misery consists in the fact that he is intermingled to evil, which is real and present in the world, and, perhaps, it is ineradicable.

Blaise Pascal said: "Greatness of man is that he is aware of his misery. Being miserable is miserable, but being aware of the misery means greatness".

Against any expectation of a happiness without neither worries nor pain (which the power of media makes use of to spread an absolute optimism), it looks like that an enigma is the only human greatness. By quoting Sofocle "The existence of the world is an endless astonishment, but nothing is as astonishing as man".

Perhaps, in front of the enigma of evil (as Paul Ricoeur said, "it is the enigma of a suffering that cannot be reduced"), we are at the beginning of an ethic of limitedness, and then an ethic which is opened to the mystery, the mystery of man and the mystery of everything. In fact, if greatness and misery of man are correctly faced, i.e. without let the absolute optimism and the absolute desperation take place, the affair about the nostalgia of what is "Totally Other" (as Horkheimer said) should be raised.