



De Ethica

A Journal of Philosophical,
Theological and Applied Ethics

Vol. 5, No. 1 (2018)

Giving an Account of Evil

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DE ETHICA

A JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

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De Ethica was founded in 2013. It published its first issue in 2014, under the guidance of its first Editor-in-Chief, distinguished professor Brenda Almond.

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From the Editors

Last August, Societas Ethica organized its 54th annual conference in Volos, Greece. The conference invited ethics from philosophical and theological perspectives to reflect on the theme 'Giving an Account of Evil'. Most of the articles in this issue were presented at the conference.

The 'problem of evil' has been an important topic for both theological and philosophical reflections throughout history. The question of how an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God could create a world in which there is evil has occupied both theologians and philosophers, although the reasons for approaching this query have been rather divergent. Analyses of the concept of evil and what counts as instances of evil are also manifold and often conflicting. Even the very usefulness of giving an account of evil is something on which views part. Some have argued that evil is an utterly meaningless concept which should be abandoned, while others maintain that the term evil connotes something that is an essential part of human life and experience.

For theologians and practical philosophers, questions concerning the relationship between evil and morality are of central importance. What is the relation between evil and concepts such as badness and wrongdoing? Of what practical relevance is an account of evil? What is the moral significance of different accounts of evil? Do the answers that we offer to the problem of evil have to be 'morally responsible' or follow certain moral standards?

A guiding assumption in this, the effort of giving an account of evil, is that different explanations and descriptions of evil are not neutral, but rather depend on the different views of the world that people have. This of course includes scholars working on the issue. Theological ethics, as well as other forms of critical inquiry, makes this insight central as it pays special attention to the interplay between different traditions' ideas about life and their moral views. This is also discernible in the articles in this issue as they all treat evil as an 'embedded' issue: as a concept that is interpreted in relation to different social institutions such as morality, politics, and religion. The articles all relate their accounts of evil to central discussions in these contexts.

In this issue, we present four articles which offer conceptual analyses from within both theological and philosophical traditions. In his article 'Evil as a Distortion of Communication: On Hegel's account of Evil as Subjectivism', Martin Sticker discusses Hegel's conception of evil, and his claim that evil is the 'internal actual, absolute certainty of itself, the pure night of being for itself'. According to Sticker, Hegel discusses evil because he worries about how Romanticism and the romantic ideal of authenticity impact on the possibility of communication. Evil is, in Hegel's understanding, primarily a

distortion of communication. This account of evil helps us to distinguish between evil and mere moral badness. Sticker's argument is that Hegel's early conception of evil, which draws on a very different paradigm than the current philosophical discourse on evil, can give us new insights and thus stimulate the on-going discussion on the concept of evil.

In the article 'On the Relevance of the Concept of Intrinsic Evil: Francisco Suárez and Contemporary Catholic Virtue Ethics Approaches', Nenad Polgar explores the relevancy of the concept of intrinsic evil in contemporary Catholic theological ethics. Polgar discusses a historical example, Francisco Suarez, as well as two contemporary positions in Catholic theological ethics on the viability of the concept of intrinsic evil. Polgar argues that we can better understand their disagreement by looking at various ways in which the concept of intrinsic evil can be used. In the end, Polgar argues in favor of discarding the concept of intrinsic evil from theological ethics since it offers no credible method for ethical analysis.

According to Ronnie Hjorth, we find an account of evil in classical political theory in the notion of evil government. A central idea among classical political theorists is that of *political decay*, whereby government turns from good to evil, or to anarchy. In his article 'Political Decay and Political Arcadianism', Hjorth contends that political decay remains a persistent problem as the political condition involves the seeds to its own destruction. Hjorth further argues that the nostalgic longing for a glorious past for nations or peoples risks turning into what he labels as 'political arcadianism', which, when focusing on the imagined past rather than the present, is a possible cause of political decay.

Chris A. Kramer, in his article 'Moral Imaginative Resistance to Heaven: Why the Problem of Evil is so Intractable', goes in to dialogue with replies to the problem of evil which argue that God permits evils to allow for future possible rewards in heaven. Kramer argues that while we can imagine that God is an omnibenevolent parent who permits evil in order to allow morally significant freedom and the rewards in heaven or punishments in hell, we should not. Rather, we should resist, practicing a form of moral imaginative resistance, and refuse to go along with the imaginative construction that the suffering of innocent children is part of God's divine plan, and ultimately just given the possible future state of heaven.

We are pleased to present an issue that contains articles which offer reflections on the problem and concept of evil from a variety of perspectives. We see it as a strength to bring together theological-ethical and moral-philosophical analyses and accounts of evil, and our hope is that this will contribute to further critical investigations of the problem and concept of evil. In this, we believe that both theological ethics and practical philosophy have critical resources to offer, and that a continuous conversation between them is vital in the pursuit of credible responses to this very complex issue.

Evil as a Distortion of Communication: On Hegel's account of Evil as Subjectivism

Martin Sticker

The early Hegel's conception of evil draws on a very different paradigm than the current philosophical discourse on evil and therefore challenges received assumptions and can give us fresh impulses. In this paper, I first present Hegel's conception of evil through a close reading of the Jenaer Realphilosophie's, prima facie, obscure claim that evil is the 'internal actual, absolute certainty of itself, the pure night of being for itself'. Hegel discusses evil because he worries how Romanticism and the romantic ideal of authenticity impact the possibility of communication. I then develop the idea that evil is a distortion of communication. I argue that this account of evil helps us to distinguish between evil and mere moral badness. Finally, I address two problems for this account, and discuss its limits.

Philosophical theories of evil are often shaped by what a theorist takes to be a *paradigmatic case* of evil. There are a number of reoccurring and influential paradigms of evil in the history of Western thought: Satan, a non-human source of seduction; the earthquake of Lisbon, a natural evil; Hitler, Stalin or famous serial killers, war criminals or psychopaths, the chief contemporary examples for moral evil. In the present paper, I focus on a conception of evil that is oriented on a paradigm of moral evil that differs notably from all these, namely, on a man named *Friedrich Schlegel*.

What did Schlegel do? Was he a psychopath, a tyrant, a German Jack the Ripper or a war criminal? Far from it. Schlegel wrote novels and philosophical reflections in the form of fragments, as well as treatises on foreign languages and cultures. Due to its praise of romantic love and disregard for traditional conceptions of marriage, Schlegel's most famous work, the novel *Lucinde*, was considered frivolous and scandalous at the time. However, this hardly warrants that we characterize its author as evil. Yet, Schlegel served as G W F Hegel's paradigm of evil because of what he stood for: Romanticism and romantic irony, which Hegel considered to be an expression of unchecked and excessive subjectivity.¹

¹ That Schlegel's Romanticism was the main target of Hegel's conception of evil is well established in the literature, see for instance Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1956), pp.

In the current paper, I explain why Hegel thinks Romanticism is evil. I then develop the theory of evil that underlies Hegel's criticism of Romanticism, largely independently of its original target. My main focus in this paper is the idea that we can understand evil as a distortion of a form of communication. This is a novel account of evil in its own right and one that can shed light on the nature and sources of evil. Hegel's conception of moral evil draws on a very different paradigm than current debates do and discussing Hegel can therefore challenge common assumptions and afford fresh impulses. In a first section, I briefly explain my main concepts and indicate in what sense I draw on Hegel's works. In a second section, I explain the early Hegel's conception of evil via a close textual reading. In a third section, I discuss the strengths of an account of evil as a distortion of communication. In a fourth section, I discuss two problems of this account.

I should note that whilst I start from one of Hegel's own characterizations of evil and draw on his idea that communication is an essential element of human existence, the idea that we can and should understand Hegel's conception of evil as a distortion of communication is my own. Furthermore, I am ultimately interested in developing a novel account of evil. This account picks out an especially interesting kind of deficiency that is different from moral badness, and it helps us understand what the difference between evil and mere moral badness is and what is deficient about evil. In a final section, I will also concede that this account has shortcomings that are finally rooted in Hegel's intriguing, and also bewildering, paradigm for evil. During my investigation, I take four things from Hegel. Firstly, his idea to see evil as an extreme form of subjectivism insofar as this subjectivism encourages agents to find normative content only within themselves and ignore social dimensions of normativity. Secondly, I will develop my account via a close reading of Hegel's dense and challenging characterization of evil in the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*. Thirdly, I will draw on Hegel's assumption that a specific form of communication is vital to human existence. Fourthly, in the last section, I will draw on a number of elements from the *Phenomenology* and Hegel's developed system in order to address objections directed against the idea that evil can be understood as a distortion of communication.

Since my investigation is ultimately not in the service of Hegel scholarship but of a better understanding evil, in particular of the idea that evil can be understood as a distortion of communication, I cannot do justice to Hegel's notion of evil as part of his later, more developed system. Obviously, Hegel's conception of evil is much richer than his brief characterization of evil in the *Realphilosophie*. In his later system it becomes apparent that evil is not a self-standing issue and it is not just a matter concerning the interaction between two (or more) individuals, but also of the interaction between individuals and the system

193-194). See also EPR §140, 265 where Hegel calls romantic irony the 'supreme form' of the expression of subjectivity and considers it the final, and presumably most severe, form of evil. Schlegel does indeed stress that irony is 'arbitrary' (KA II:160.108) thus indicating that irony is for him a mere expression of subjectivity or of arbitrary preferences. I will say more about Hegel's criticism of Schlegel at the end of sec.II. In what follows, I cite the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* according to Hegel (1970) vol.7: EPR §paragraph, page. My translation follows Wood (1991). I cite Schlegel according to Behler (1979): KA volume:page.fragment. Translations, with occasional modifications, are from Frichow (1971). Translations from the *Philosophische Lehrjahre* in vol.18 are my own.

as a whole. Evil arises when the individual mistakes itself to be the absolute and above the system. I will abstract from this since it would go beyond the scope of my paper. Furthermore, abstracting from the systematic context of evil also allows me to sidestep a number of objections often levelled against Hegel's theory of evil, such as that Hegel's notion of evil aims at subsuming the individual under the system or under a collective² or that an account, which conceives of evil as part of a rational system, thereby justifies or condones evil.³ These are not problems for my project of developing the idea that evil is a distortion of communication, since such a conception does not have to be part of a system.

I

The conception of evil I will focus on is located in Hegel's *Jenaer Realphilosophie* written in 1805/06 and only published posthumously in 1931. The *Realphilosophie* was written at the same time as the *Phenomenology of Mind*. In this section, I briefly look at the *Phenomenology*, the much more prominent text of the two, in order to gain a better understanding of the background of Hegel's thoughts at the time insofar as this will help us understand his notion of evil. Obviously, I cannot even attempt to do the *Phenomenology* justice here, given that its themes span from perception to self-consciousness, to social philosophy and philosophy of religion and history. In fact, I will focus on one single element in paragraph 69 of the *Phenomenology's* Preface, since this element is very illustrative of Hegel's philosophical and ethical concerns at the time. Hegel here criticizes appeal to 'feeling, to an oracle dwelling within'⁴ or to immediate certainty as 'trampling the roots of humanity underfoot'⁵, i.e., as a severe violation of our human nature or of what we, as humans, are capable of and entitled to. Appeals to immediate certainty are supposed to stop a conversation as they are to function as instances of final justification that others cannot object to.⁶ By contrast, it is, according to Hegel:

² I will, however, show in sec.II and IV that we should not understand Hegel's criticism of subjectivism as him denying the importance and normative standing of subjectivity.

³ See Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil. A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002), p. 75.

⁴ PoM §69, 64. The extreme form of the internal oracle is the beautiful soul, which Hegel discusses polemically towards the end of the Geist chapter (PoM §658, 483f.). In what follows, I cite the *Phenomenology* according to Hegel (1970.) vol.3: PoM §paragraph, page. My translation follows Pinkard (2013) with occasional modifications.

⁵ PoM §69, 65.

⁶ The person who appeals to immediacy supposes that he 'has spoken of final things against which nobody can object nor beyond which anything more can be demanded' (PoM §69, 64). These final pronouncements can, for instance, take the form of appeals to 'the immediate revelation of the divine' (PoM §68, 63), as well as to one's 'heart's innocence' and 'purity of conscience' (§69, 64). All of these sources escape external scrutiny by others since they are only present within the person who appeals to them. Hegel, by contrast, demands that 'the best' may not be 'hidden away in inwardness; the best was supposed to be drawn up out of that deep well and brought up to the light of day' (PoM §69, 64). See also PoM §10, 17f., §14, 20f.

the nature [of humanity] to drive men to agreement with one another, and humanity's existence lies only in the commonality of consciousness that has been brought about. The anti-human, the merely animalistic, consists in staying put in the sphere of feeling and in being able to communicate only by means of such feelings.⁷

According to this passage, it is an important, maybe even essential, feature of human existence that we can interact in other ways than through appeal to immediate certainty. We can (and have to) provide reasons and justifications, and these reasons and justifications have to be accessible to others in the sense that they can understand and critically evaluate them. Giving and taking reasons serves to drive men (and women) to an agreement with each other, and this agreement is not the result of force, threat or deception but of insight into the merits and justification of a claim or position.⁸

Hegel's concept of communication as something that is part of the nature of humanity and as something that is supposed to lead to a commonality of consciousness is a much more specific form of what we usually mean by 'communication'. After all, communication that stays 'put in the sphere of feeling' is also communication, but not the kind that Hegel thinks deserves protection and philosophical attention. We can label the communication that lies in the nature of humanity '*communication in a rich sense*'. Hegel assumes that the root of humanity consists in striving for agreement ('to drive men to agreement with one another'). This agreement consists in a 'commonality of consciousness' that does not merely occur accidentally when two agents share the same feeling or inner voice, but 'that has been brought about', i.e., one that results from agents striving together for agreement via a mutual exchange of arguments. Communication in a rich sense requires reciprocity between agents engaged in communication with each other and this reciprocity is not merely the reciprocity of two agents communicating their feelings or subjective states to each other. 'Reciprocity' means that agents make normative claims or demands on each other, ask each other for justifications of these claims and demands and, in turn, are willing to support their claims and demands with reasons. Communicating agents are in principle willing to take others' claims and demands into account. They either make these claims their own or provide reasons for why they reject them, and they are open to others' replies.

In what follows, I will argue that we can fruitfully understand evil as a disruption or distortion of communication in the rich sense just outlined. Whilst Hegel himself does not explicitly say this, I suggest that we use his claim about the root of humanity to understand why he objects to certain forms of subjectivism as evil. The reason for this is that his objection might otherwise appear mysterious, and to fuel long-standing concerns that Hegel is an anti-individualistic thinker who wants citizens to defer mindlessly to the

⁷ PoM §69, 65.

⁸ The central role communication plays for the *Phenomenology* also becomes apparent in Hegel's various discussions of *language* the element in which the fulfilling sense is present (PoM §695, 510) and which can reveal what otherwise remains internal (PoM §696, 511). See also PoM §710-2, 518-21, §726ff., 528ff. In Martin Sticker, 'Hegel und die Wurzel der Humanität', *Hegel Jahrbuch* (forthcoming) I discuss in more detail Hegel's notion that communication and striving for agreement is the nature of humanity. I show how this notion informs the entire *Phenomenology* but also criticize that Hegel fails to do justice to the phenomenon of rational disagreement as another essential feature of human communication.

community or to state authority. Focus on the phenomenon of communication in a rich sense helps us to make sense of Hegel's early conception of evil as well as allows us to explain why he saw something wrong with certain forms of subjectivism.

Before I outline the *Realphilosophie's* conception of evil in the next section, let me stress that I do not claim that evil is a disruption of communication in a sense other than in the rich sense I outlined. Communication is a broader phenomenon than the reciprocal exchange of reasons. Issuing orders and commands, certain expressions of politeness, discussing merely technical (non-normative) matters, etc. are all forms of communication, albeit not in the rich sense that, according to Hegel, is characteristic of human existence. Unless otherwise specified, I will mean by 'communication' communication in a rich sense. Communication, as I use the term, thus requires the possibility of an *exchange* of normative claims or that all agents involved in communication are, in principle, willing to take into account what others have to say and willing to make their normative claims their own if they find them convincing. 'Normative claims' here is intended as a somewhat clumsy catch all for that which is given and exchanged in communication in a rich sense: requests, demands, reasons, arguments, etc.

To give a brief example of what I mean by communication in a rich sense as opposed to other communication: Imagine I order my employee to perform a task and she tells me that she will not do it because this is not part of her contractual obligations; it would require overtime work without pay; it is unfair that this chore once again rests with her, etc. We are communicating in a rich sense if I take her objections into account and either change my mind; or point out that in fact it is part of her contractual obligations (I acknowledge that the contract binds both her and me); I offer overtime pay (I acknowledge that making my employees work overtime require that I compensate them accordingly); I point out that in fact it is her turn to do it this time (I acknowledge that my orders must be fair). We do not communicate in a rich sense if I give her the order and then just walk back to my office and shut the door without listening to her; only engage with her objections on a superficial level; answer that I don't want to hear any complaints; ask her why she must always complain.⁹ Communication in a rich sense allows for hierarchies and asymmetries but not for lack of rational engagement with others. I should also note that not everyone who (occasionally) refuses to communicate in the rich sense qualifies as evil. Only an agent who has made it the centre of her identity not to communicate in a rich sense does.

Communication in a rich sense matters for my discussion for two reasons. Firstly, as I explained, Hegel himself acknowledges that there is something very significant about our ability to communicate with each other: it is part of the nature of humanity. Understanding evil as a disruption of communication thus offers an exegetically grounded way to revisit and reconsider Hegel's conception of evil based on a concern that even those who do not buy into Hegel's system can share. After all, that demanding and giving

⁹ Of course, matters are potentially more complicated than I presented them. What if the task is clearly part of the contract, does not require overtime and it is the employee's turn and she does complain every single time she has to do something? In this case, it might be appropriate to tell her to stop complaining, if I have in the past pointed out to her why something is her contractual duty, part of the normal work day, and under what conditions it is fair to give her the task, and if I was willing to listen to her objections then. Communication in a rich sense does not require that we have the same conversation over and over again.

reasons and asking for justifications is something fundamentally human seems uncontentious. Secondly, one central aspect of communication is that it allows us to criticise other agents and even potentially to change their minds. According to my analysis, evil agents cannot be criticised in the same way as non-evil agents. There is (almost) nothing to be gained by criticising evil agents. Looking at how we can criticise agents will help us to distinguish between morally bad, evil and insane agents.

II

Hegel's early account of evil, on which I focus, is largely neglected in the Hegel literature as well as in the literature on evil. This is presumably due to its relative obscurity as well as because it stands in the shadow of Hegel's more mature account of evil, which can be found, for instance, in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Furthermore, despite Hegel offering the densest possible characterization of his early conception of evil in the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, he does almost nothing to develop it here. In what follows, I will use the *Phenomenology* to elucidate this dense characterization, since there are many parallels between the *Realphilosophie* and the *Phenomenology*.

In the *Jenaer Realphilosophie* (JR) Hegel characterises moral evil as 'internal actual [ii], absolute certainty of itself [iii], the pure night [iv] of being for itself [i]'.¹⁰ In this section, I interpret and explain this dense characterization.

[i] *Being for itself*: Being for itself is the subject of this account of evil. The other three components of the account are characteristics of a being for itself, which is evil. The context, as well as other passages, show that 'being for itself' here refers to an agent's *self-consciousness*.¹¹ Evil is a property of self-conscious agents or, more precisely, of their attitudes towards themselves and of how they understand the normative authority of their selves.¹² In what follows, I will simply speak of an evil *agent*, but strictly speaking evil pertains to the self-consciousness of this agent. An agent be characterized as evil if he has the following three characteristics.

[ii] *Internal actual*: 'actual' [Wirklichkeit] for Hegel does not refer to what merely exists, but to the rational or justified part of what exists, as it is apparent from Hegel's

¹⁰ 'innerliche Wirkliche, absolute Gewißheit seiner selbst, die reine Nacht des Fürsichseins'. This characterization occurs in G. W. F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1968ff.), vol. 8, p. 256 separated in two different margins. The edition G. Göhler, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Frühe politische Systeme* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1974), published two years before vol.8 of the *Gesammelte Werke*, puts it in the main text (p. 262) and as one sentence. In what follows, I will quote the *Realphilosophie*, according to *Gesammelte Werke* vol.8 and also provide the page numbers of the Göhler edition. JR translations are my own.

¹¹ Cf. PoM §186, 147: 'Self-consciousness is at first simple being-for-itself'. The idea that evil is a property of self-consciousness is also maintained in Hegel's later works – cf. EPR §139, 260f.

¹² The attribution of evil to *agents*, as opposed to actions or their outcomes, is further warranted by JR 250 margin/258. Treating evil as a property of something other than actions, e.g., of the character, the person, or the agent is a widely accepted view. Cf. for instance Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 22, Adam Morton, *On Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Others, however, do consider evil a property of actions (see for instance Paul Formosa, 'A Conception of Evil', *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 42:2 (2008), pp. 217-239).

famous *Doppelsatz*: 'What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational'.¹³ The first characteristic of an evil agent is that what is actual or rational and justified for him is *internal*. An evil agent takes what is internal to him, or subjective, as a source of justification of his actions. Hegel therefore also writes that evil is 'divided from the universal'.¹⁴ In the preface of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's example for such an internal actual, is, as we have already seen, the 'internal oracle'¹⁵, which he identifies with an agent's immediate feeling that something is right. The problem with taking one's immediate feeling that something is right as a source of justification is that the justificatory force of the immediate feeling depends on the presence of this immediate feeling within an agent. There is no way for an agent to rationally convince another agent to have or share this immediate feeling. An agent either has such a feeling or he does not.¹⁶ Anything an agent becomes convinced of as a result of arguments presented to her would not come as an *immediate* certainty. Appeals to one's subjectivity can thus constitute appeals to immediacy and disrupt communication understood as an exchange of reasons and arguments.

However, we should bear in mind that subjectivity for Hegel is a necessary moment of agency and a guiding principle specifically of modern societies. Justifying claims by appeal to one's subjectivity is legitimate in many circumstances, such as in matters of taste and personal lifestyle choices. Hegel is primarily worried about the Romanticist ideal of authenticity since it overemphasizes the normative significance of subjectivity.¹⁷

The kind of 'internal actual' that is problematic for Hegel is most clearly presented in the *Phenomenology's* discussion of conscience.¹⁸ There Hegel identifies a determination by one's internal law with determination by one's 'singularity' [Einzelnheit]¹⁹ and 'arbitrariness' [Willkür]²⁰. Being determined by one's internal law is for Hegel a violation of what is universally recognized.²¹ 'Singularity' refers to a source of supposed justification, such as idiosyncratic personal convictions that the agent is certain of immediately and which he cannot justify to others and yet refuses to give up. An agent's singularity is private in the sense that other agents have no influence over what the content

¹³ EPR Preface, 24.

¹⁴ JR 249 margin/257.

¹⁵ PoM §69, 64.

¹⁶ PoM §69, 64f.

¹⁷ The most extensive and recent defence of Hegel against the charge that he is an enemy of subjectivity is Dean Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). According to Moyar, Hegel's political philosophy explicitly aims to make room for subjectivity.

¹⁸ The tight connection between conscience and evil is maintained in Hegel's later writings. Cf. EPR §139. Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience* presents an elaborate argument that Hegel also envisioned a positive role for conscience. Whilst Hegel was dismissive of formal conscience, he 'unambiguously defends a view of conscience that he calls 'actual conscience'' (Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience* p. 72).

¹⁹ The standard translation of 'Einzel(n)heit' is 'individuality'. This is inadequate since it does not allow us to distinguish between 'Einzelheit' and 'Individualität'. I will therefore use the more literal term 'singularity' as a translation of 'Einzel(n)heit'.

²⁰ Due to this arbitrariness conscience as a source of justification can, in principle, justify any action. Other agents therefore 'do not know whether this conscience is morally good or evil; or to an even greater degree, not only can they not know this, they must also take it to be evil' (PoM §649, 477f.).

²¹ PoM §662, 486., cf. also JR 250 margin/258.

of this singularity is, i.e., they cannot talk an agent out of something he finds within his singularity. Others' normative claims are completely irrelevant to an agent's singularity because these claims do not stem from this singularity and an agent's singularity does not acknowledge any normative authority other than its own.

Hegel believes that appeals to feeling of certainty, internal oracles, conscience and authenticity are appeals to one's singularity. If they were more than appeals to one's singularity then agents could and would be willing to justify their claims in a proper discursive form (as opposed to insisting on the immediate certainty of these claims). The following two components, [iii] and [iv], of Hegel's account of evil specify an attitude of an agent towards his subjectivity, which leaves no room in an agent's deliberations for external input (*exclusivity*) and which lets an agent attach absolute confidence to his own subjectivity (*immediate certainty*). This, Hegel believes, turns appeals to subjectivity into appeals to singularity.²²

[iii] *Absolute certainty of itself*: An evil agent attaches absolute credence to his subjectivity. For an evil agent, a normative claim is justified beyond doubt if it stems from his subjectivity. The agent is certain that his subjectivity cannot go wrong and can justify all kinds of claims, not only those regarding taste or personal lifestyle choice, i.e., for instance moral claims or claims concerning what he is entitled to. An agent is certain of claims if they *feel* right to her. This right feeling should be understood in a broad sense. The examples from the *Phenomenology* indicate that such a feeling can stem from a supposed divine command (internal oracle), supposed moral convictions (conscience), or other personal beliefs and goals. Feeling, in this sense, is everything that seems immediately correct or evident to the agent and that he thus believes without second-guessing and not based on other, intersubjectively shareable, evidence or reasons.

[iv] *Pure night*: Following my reading of [i-iii] the metaphor of the pure night can be understood as referring to the attitude of an evil agent to sources of justification other than his subjectivity. A pure night is literally a night exhibiting nothing but the characteristic property of a night: darkness.²³ This is an inhibition of vision that makes it impossible to gain information about the external world. It is a state in which an agent falls back on his internal actual because his access to what is external to him is inhibited. Insofar as an evil agent takes a normative claim to be justified, this justification cannot come from an external source but comes from the approval of his subjectivity. The evil agent does not consider anything as conferring normative standing other than the immediate conviction that something is right.

Hegel also refers to evil as 'the *pure knowledge* of oneself' ²⁴, i.e., as knowledge of nothing but one's subjectivity. This claim is *prima facie* puzzling since self-knowledge is usually seen as something good and extremely important.²⁵ Hegel's remark makes sense if

²² That evil is a specific attitude towards one's subjectivity is also maintained in Hegel's more mature writings. Cf. EPR §139, 260-1. Hegel thinks that it is a specifically modern form of evil when '*subjectivity declares itself absolute*' (EPR §140, 265).

²³ In JR 252 margin/260 Hegel calls evil 'this darkness of *man* in itself'.

²⁴ JR 252 margin/260.

²⁵ Hegel even calls the command to know thyself an 'absolute command' (Enz §377, 9). I cite the *Encyclopedia* according to Hegel (1970) vol.10: Enz §paragraph, page. Translations are my own.

we understand it not as a warning against knowing oneself, but as a warning against knowing *nothing but* oneself or against failing to engage and communicate with other agents and learning about *them* (their views, projects, claims, etc.).

Evil, according to Hegel, should be understood as a property of a self-conscious agent [i], who takes her subjectivity to be a source of justification [ii] of a specific kind. An evil agent rests sure in her arbitrary convictions (*immediate certainty*) [iii] and other agents as well as institutions and the community lack means to correct or rationally influence this agent and to provide normative input into her deliberations (*exclusivity*) [iv]. This agent is not merely someone who values her subjectivity, after all subjectivity has its rightful place, but someone who is obsessed with her singularity, i.e., with a supposed source of normative claims that is beyond rational criticism and the claims of which cannot be justified to others. Evil is the inability of stepping out of oneself and of seeing oneself from another perspective, which one acknowledges as rational or normative. Evil can be understood as a *disruption of communication* because an evil agent does not take the normative claims of others into account and does not respond to them *as* normative claims, i.e., as potential reasons to change his mind. An *exchange* of normative claims with such an agent is not possible. Other agents cannot function as a corrective for this agent and this is what makes his views and goals potentially so dangerous. Evil agents do not accept any externally imposed limits.²⁶

Before we move on to a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the notion of evil as a disruption of communication let me briefly say something about Hegel's paradigm for evil, Friedrich Schlegel. I believe that Hegel does present a serious challenge to the ideal of authenticity, insofar as this ideal expresses purely subjective preferences, and as long as there is no need to justify oneself to others in an authentic life. However, Romanticism cannot be reduced to this ideal. This is particularly apparent for Schlegel himself. The truly ironic person is more distanced from the concrete features of her subjectivity than the evil person is according to Hegel. For her, her power to set ends is more fundamental than whatever those ends happen to be and she is well aware of the contingency of each end, even from her own point of view.²⁷

The consensus in the Romanticism literature on the dispute between Hegel and Schlegel is that Hegel got Schlegel 'badly wrong'²⁸ and that he misreads Schlegel as a pure subjectivist and irresponsible free thinker.²⁹ Schlegel is not an anti-systematic thinker who

²⁶ Of course, agents who do accept external limits can still be very bad. After all, the limits might be unjustified (for instance deferring to a *Führer* might be an appeal to external limits). It should also be noted that some supposed appeals to external limits, such as divine command, are for Hegel better understood not as appeals to *external* limits but as appeals to an *internal* oracle.

²⁷ I am grateful to Seiriol Morgan and Nadine Köhne for pressing me to distinguish between irony and authenticity as possible targets of Hegel's criticism.

²⁸ Judith Norman, 'Squaring the Romantic Circle', *Proceedings of the Hegel Society of America* 14 (2000), pp. 131-144, at p. 131.

²⁹ Frederick, Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative. The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 2 stresses that it was the goal of Romanticism to 'reconcile the demands of community and those of individual liberty' not to deny any role to society. Furthermore, he argues that Schlegel endorsed romanticism chiefly because of its (anti-Fichtean) 'antifoundationalism' (ibid.108). Schlegel, indeed, stresses that philosophical principles 'are always in a plural', and he criticises the 'foundation-mad' philosophers such as Fichte (KA XVIII:105.910, see

wants to surrender philosophy, society and life-choices to arbitrariness, subjectivity or one's singularity.³⁰ For Schlegel 'Philosophy is the real homeland of irony', since 'wherever philosophy appears in oral or written dialogues [...] there irony should be asked for and provided'.³¹ Irony here is not supposed to function as an appeal to immediacy but rather as something that fosters dialogue among rational agents.³² Schlegel even claims that '*Doing philosophy* means searching for omniscience together'.³³

Hegel's conception of evil might not fly as a criticism of early Romanticism, given that the Romantics are not necessarily committed to the unchecked subjectivity Hegel makes the target of his conception of evil. However, this still leaves us with the question of whether Hegel presents an interesting conception of evil that helps us understand the phenomenon. In what follows, I discuss the idea that evil is a distortion of communication, which I suggested is a fruitful way of understanding Hegel's conception of evil and concerns with Romanticism.

III

The conception of evil I developed in the previous section has the potential to give us a neat distinction between evil and moral badness. This is important, because, according to a wide-spread intuition, evil is different from mere moral badness.³⁴ A philosophical

also KA XVIII:518.16). Hegel himself was an anti-foundationalist, as becomes apparent in his critical discussion of Reinhold's 'Grundsatzphilosophie' in PoM §19, 20, §24, 27f. Hegel thus presumably shared at least some of the concerns that led Schlegel to endorse Romanticism. For further defence of romantic irony against Hegel see Norman, 'Squaring the Romantic Circle', and Martin Sticker and Daniel Wenz, 'System und Systemkritik – Witz und Ironie als philosophische Methode beim frühen Friedrich Schlegel', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 120:1 (2013), pp. 64-81, sec.2.

³⁰ See for instance KA II:173.53.

³¹ KA II:152.42.

³² In his critical discussion of irony, Hegel distinguishes between Plato's conception of irony as a way to engage others in dialogue and Schlegel's romantic iron. He takes no issue with the former and only sees the latter as something that is intended as an attempt to present an ultimate justification ('the ultimate factor') in the form of appeals to one's subjectivity (EPR §140, 277). It seems, however, that Schlegel's conception of irony might rather fit the bill of platonic irony than Hegel's conception of romantic irony. See Bärbel Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus. J.G. Fichte und Fr. Schlegel* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), p. 332 for a conception of irony according to which irony is a personal ideal of self-perfection and self-distance, not simply an expression of arbitrariness. In the literature many authors concur that Schlegel was no anti-systematic thinker who advocated unchecked subjectivism and arbitrariness, but rather someone who championed a distinct form of dialectic. See for instance, Manfred Frank, 'Philosophische Grundlagen der Frühromantik', *Athenäum*, 4 (1994), pp.37-130, at pp. 126-30, Rüdiger Bubner, 'Zur Dialektischen Bedeutung romantischer Ironie', in *Innovationen des Idealismus*, edited by Rüdiger Bubner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), pp. 152-163, Sticker, Wenz, 'System und Systemkritik'.

³³ KA XVIII:515.97, see also KA II:160.108.

³⁴ Paul Formosa, 'Evils, Wrongs and Dignity: How to Test a Theory of Evil', *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 47:3 (2013), pp. 235-253 for instance argues that evil is "a different moral category" than mere badness. See also John Kekes, *Facing Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 49, Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton

conception of evil should be able to explain how evil differs from mere badness or wrongdoing.

We can understand how evil as a distortion of communication captures this difference if we look at deliberation. Morally bad agents tend to accord an *undue* weight to certain normative claims, usually their own, sometimes also claims of members of their gang or criminal organisation, members of the same race, gender, etc.³⁵, and they act based on their biased deliberations.³⁶ This, however, does not mean that they attach *no* weight to normative claims of others. Even a morally bad agent recognizes that others' claims as well as universally recognized norms count for something, even if these do not stem from their own subjectivity. An evil agent, by contrast, never takes into account normative claims from sources other than his subjectivity. The evil agent does not attach a special weight to his own normative claims; rather, he attaches *no weight at all* to other claims. These other claims do not enter his deliberation. The evil agent is not biased but fundamentally ignorant.³⁷

This way to distinguish between bad and evil has three implications:

(i) The morally good and the morally bad agent have in common that their deliberations are *complex*. The morally bad agent takes into account claims justified by a wide range of sources and has to rank these claims or weigh them against each other. His deliberations work like the deliberations of the morally good agent except that he commits occasional or frequent mistakes in the weighing of different claims against each other. The normative deliberations of the evil agent, by contrast, are *simple* since he only takes into account claims from one source. The evil agent does not worry about questions of commensurability, such as what weight to attach to his self-interest, needs of others, special obligations to loved ones, universally recognized norms, rights, etc. His deliberations are simply determined by his singularity. Whatever he is immediately certain of, what feels right to him, he takes as sufficiently justified no matter what. It might therefore even be

University Press, 2002), p. 8., Roy Perrett, 'Evil and Human Nature', *The Monist* 85:2 (2002), pp. 304-19, at pp. 304-305 for the distinction between evil and moral badness.

³⁵ There are of course many difficult issues here, such as: Is it undue to attach more weight to the claims of loved ones? Answering this question presupposes a detailed discussion of the moral status of personal relationships, which I cannot embark on here. Furthermore, I do not claim that agents are *either* morally bad *or* morally good - this would be a very 'unhegelian' dichotomy. A clear case of a morally bad agent is someone whose actions are always shaped by her conviction that she counts for more than others. Many actual agents deserve a more nuanced characterisation.

³⁶ Of course, this is just one kind of moral badness. Another prominent one would be weakness of will - an agent reaches an unbiased judgment but is then overwhelmed by passions and acts against his own judgment. I will focus on moral badness as it manifests itself in deliberation so as to clearly contrast badness with evil.

³⁷ That evil agents exhibit a 'total failure to see that certain considerations are reasons at all' is sometimes called 'psychological silencing' (Eve Garrard, 'Evil as an Explanatory Concept', *The Monist* 85:2 (2002), pp. 329-336, at pp. 329-330). Things that otherwise would constitute reasons, such as '[t]he sufferings of his victims, along with other considerations such as their rights, play no part in [the evil agent's] practical deliberations. They count for nothing at all. And it is this silencing, this inability to hear the victims' screams as significant, that accounts for the peculiar horror that we feel when we contemplate these evil acts and their agents' (Eve Garrard, 'The Nature of Evil', *Philosophical Explorations* 1:1 (1998), pp. 43-60, at pp. 53-4).

incorrect to say that the evil agent deliberates, if by 'deliberate' we mean a weighing of pros and cons. The evil agent rather listens to himself until he becomes certain of something without engaging in critical deliberation in the normal sense. One of the attractions that being evil has for evil agents is that it makes decisions very simple and seemingly allows agents to sidestep many difficult issues.³⁸ One of the characteristics of evil that evil as a distortion of communication successfully captures is that evil can result from, or be accompanied by, a form of thoughtlessness or overly simplistic worldview that is ignorant of important aspects that are obvious to everyone but the evil agent.

(ii) We can *communicate* (in a rich sense) with bad agents but not with evil ones. A bad agent will take the claims we articulate to him into account – although often not to the extent that he should. We can argue with a bad agent, try to show him that he has attached an undue weight to certain claims, and point out why he should not have done so. The bad agent will then either admit his mistake, or, more likely, deny that he attached an undue weight, or try to justify his way of deliberating and acting to others. An exchange of normative claims with the bad agent is possible, he is willing to enter the process of reason-giving-and-taking. The evil agent, however, sees no need to enter this process or to take objections into account. The only way for such an agent to be criticised by other agents is when the claims of other agents *happen* to correlate with claims that also have the backing of the evil agent's singularity. Whether they do, however, is a matter of pure chance, and is independent of how good the respective claims are justified from an objective or intersubjective perspective. The conception of evil as distortion of communication does capture that evil is often not just a matter of great harm but inflicted by people who cannot be swayed by rational argument or by anything the victims of evil or anyone else could say.

It is still possible, though, to criticise an evil agent *internally* by taking his own claims and beliefs for granted and pointing out internal inconsistencies – if there are indeed inconsistencies.³⁹ The possibility of criticising the evil agent internally, however, is not sufficient to constitute communication. Internal criticism can, at most, bring the agent to exchange one of his idiosyncratic beliefs for another. This means that occasionally we will get the impression that an evil agent reacts to us in the right way, i.e., that he takes our claims into account, but in fact he is still determined by his singularity. I will say more about this below (sec.IV.i) when I discuss the difference between evil and insanity.

³⁸ Of course, there could be marginal cases: Take an agent who does extreme harm to others for a trivial personal gain but would not have inflicted the harm if the expected gain was just a little more trivial than it already was. Such an agent does acknowledge others' rights and claims but assigns such a minimal weight to them that he collapses the distinction between moral badness and evil. I am open to that. In fact, Hegel's problem is rather that there is too much *divergence* between evil and moral badness than too little (see sec.IV.ii). I am grateful to Seiriol Morgan for raising this point.

³⁹ It might also sometimes be appropriate to criticise evil agents from an external perspective not because we can hope that the evil agent will change her mind or even respond to us, but in order to demonstrate to a third party that a certain form of behaving is not on. I am grateful to Seiriol Morgan for alerting me to this point.

(iii) Evil as a distortion of communication also accommodates the wide-spread intuition that evil agents, in contrast to morally bad ones, cannot feel shame or remorse.⁴⁰ An evil agent does not understand that anything he did, said or believed, was objectionable because it was unobjectionable to him and nothing else matters to him. He sees no need to reconsider his position in the light of the normative claims of other agents, because he sees no point in these claims. In fact, he cannot even recognize them as genuinely normative.

IV

I will now discuss the two main problems of the Hegelian account of evil I developed. These problems are (i) that it might look as if the evil person is insane rather than evil, and (ii) that 'evil' might be a stark exaggeration as a label for the deficiency the account captures. I do not think that Hegel has the resources to give a completely satisfying response to the latter objection. Nonetheless, I believe that discussing these objections does not only reveal weaknesses of Hegel's theory of evil but also some important features for our theorizing about evil. Before I discuss these objections, I will briefly address one other issue.

From what I argued so far one might get the impression that Hegel's theory of evil denies something that is (almost) trivially true. Isn't it obviously the case that all claims we take to be valid or action guiding *for us* are claims that we also subjectively approve of? When Hegel worries about agents who only take into account that which stems from their subjectivity, is he implying that agents can take into account claims their subjectivity does not approve of, and even that they *should* do so? Surely, this cannot be required of agents. It is clear for Hegel that for a claim to be normative for a (modern) individual, this individual herself must accept the claim. This acceptance, however, does not have to be the approval of the agent's *singularity*. Evil means that we accept claims as beyond doubt because our singularity approves of them in the sense that they feel immediately right (immediate certainty) and that we do not accept anything else and do not have any doubts about them (exclusivity). However, it is not the case that everything we subjectively accept is immediately certain to us, nor is everything we accept ultimately rooted in private and idiosyncratic ideas that we cannot justify to others. Evil is a specific attitude that agents have towards themselves and we can be subjectively convinced of something without taking up this attitude. Furthermore, often we are aware that what we believe could be false and we are aware of reasons that count against our beliefs, but yet we take these beliefs to be, on balance, better justified than competing beliefs. Such an attitude of accepting something cautiously and on balance is alien to an evil agent.

Let us now turn to the two deeper problems. (i) It seems that an evil agent on the conception of evil as distortion of communication is completely caught up in her own system of idiosyncratic beliefs and is unable to be corrected by others. The medical term for such an agent would presumably be 'insane'. This is a problem for two reasons. Firstly, 'evil' might be a superfluous concept if it is merely a different word for a psychological or

⁴⁰ Cf. also Perrett, 'Evil and Human Nature', p. 304 and Brian Barry, 'Extremity of Vice and the Character of Evil', *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 35 (2010), pp. 25-42, at p. 30 who stress this element of evil.

pathological condition. Secondly, insane people are commonly considered unaccountable for their deeds. It would be odd if evil got agents, morally and legally, of the hook.

Let me begin my response with two remarks: Firstly, the proximity between 'evil' and 'insane' might not be coincidental for Hegel, given the target he has in mind. Some of the Romantics he criticised, such as Hölderlin, struggled with mental illness⁴¹, and many of them were very interested in phenomena, such as mental illness, depression, suicide, etc. Hegel calls madness ('Verrücktheit') the reign of the 'evil genius of man' ['böse Genius des Menschen'].⁴² Clearly, he thought that evil and insanity overlap at least partly. Secondly, it might be unfair to press Hegel or Hegelian theories of evil too hard here, given that the problem that there is no clear-cut distinction between evil and insanity is not just a problem for these theories but rather is rooted in the very phenomenon. It seems that many paradigms of evil agents, such as Hitler, Stalin, serial killers, could also serve as paradigms for forms of mentally illness. In fact, many paradigms of moral evil have been studied by psychologists because of their (alleged or real) mental illnesses.

Still, this leaves us with the question of what the difference might be between evil and insanity. We can draw a distinction by looking at how we can and cannot criticise evil and insane persons respectively. Non-evil agents (good and bad ones) can be criticised internally as well as externally. As I already argued, evil agents can still be subject to internal criticism (sec.III.i) in the sense that such a form of criticism could change an evil agent's mind. Insane people, by contrast, are not even susceptible to *internal* criticism. They are not susceptible to criticism at all. Insanity means that a person is so completely caught in her own web of beliefs that the web is even resistant to the charge of internal contradiction. A truly insane person either does not worry about contradictions⁴³ or, when an internal contradiction is pointed out to her, she does not see this as a problem for retaining her beliefs, since she will simply make up *ad hoc* assumptions and explanations to smooth over the internal tension. With an evil agent I can only discuss in her own terms (and this does not constitute communication in the rich sense), with an insane agent I cannot discuss at all. The way to distinguish between evil and insanity is asking the

⁴¹ In his famous description of the beautiful soul, Hegel makes an oblique reference to the way Novalis died from tuberculosis, when he claims that the beautiful soul "melts into a yearning tubercular consumption" (PoM §668, 491). Hegel here makes a pun based on the German term for "consumption", "Schwindsucht", which is also a colloquial term for tuberculosis. Hegel thought that the way the Romantics lived and died reveals something about their philosophies.

⁴² Enz §408, 162.

⁴³ Hegel only writes for an audience that accepts that contradiction is a problem. My conception of an insane person departs from Hegel's more mundane conception of a 'mentally deranged' who still 'has a lively feeling of the contradiction between his merely subjective presentation and objectivity. He is however unable to rid himself of this presentation and is fully intent either on actualizing it or demolishing what is actual' (Enz §408, 176). It seems that Hegel cannot envisage an agent who is not moved at all by a contradiction to adapt her views. Even the beautiful soul who 'breaks down into madness' still has 'consciousness of this contradiction in its unreconciled immediacy', which leads it to "give up its grim adherence to *its being-for-itself*" (PoM §668, 491). Hegel presumably would not think of a person who fails to feel the pressure to resolve contradictions as an *agent*, since agency requires the capacity to plan ahead and to hold distinct views. Agents who could hold and act on contradictory beliefs and goals without seeing any need to be consistent in their beliefs and actions and who are thus unable to limit themselves to distinct beliefs and goals lack this crucial capacity.

question: Can I latch on to something *in* that agent to criticise her and, if I can, could that criticism lead to a change of mind?⁴⁴ This might not give us a sharp distinction between evil and insanity for all cases, but as I have pointed out, this fuzziness might be grounded in the very phenomenon of evil.

(ii) In sec.III, I argued that, according to the conception of evil as a distortion of communication, evil and moral badness are separate phenomena. Evil is not a question of actions and their consequences, but of attitudes to oneself. This implies that an evil agent might believe that his true self is a philanthropist and spend his time volunteering for the needy. He might, however, also have a different, much less benevolent, conception of his true self, and what this conception is, is not up for rational debate. Hegel's provocative notion is that there is something deeply deficient even with a self-sacrificing philanthropist if this 'philanthropist' helps others simply because he takes being a philanthropist to be his true self no matter what. Hegel believes that there is something fundamentally wrong with a person who effectively cannot be criticised from an external standpoint and who does not understand that an immediate and private feeling that something is true or right is insufficient justification for that feeling.⁴⁵

It is often assumed that if something is evil it must also be morally wrong.⁴⁶ This is not the case for Hegel. According to his conception, evil agents might do less harm (in terms of consequences) than morally bad agents, and the evil agent might not be morally bad at all if we understand moral badness in terms of rights violations or infliction of harm. In fact, the evil agent might be, according to Hegel's own paradigm, a poet, novelist and philosopher who is deeply dissatisfied with the human condition in the age of industrialization and enlightenment and who sees society as a source of alienation. One might object that Hegel's account of evil does not sufficiently match our intuitions about who counts as evil. What I am talking about in this paper might rather capture a specific moral and intellectual *vice* but not evil.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The way to engage, and maybe even cure, an insane person is thus not through internal criticism but through medication and therapy that requires specialized medical and psychological training and expertise.

⁴⁵ Suspicion against philanthropists based on their motives is of course not restricted to Hegel. See Kant's famous criticism of the 'friend of humanity' who helps others albeit for the wrong reasons and whose actions thus lack moral worth (AA IV:398-9). However, Kant, unlike Hegel, does not go so far as to think that this agent would be *evil*, at least not in a sense other than radical evil, which pertains to all of us (see below). Hegel would maintain that the philanthropist who is following nothing but her own subjectivity is still criticisable since her attitude betrays that '[i]t is not the thing which is excellent, it is I who am excellent and master of both law and thing' (EPR §140, 279). I cite Kant according to Kant (1900 ff.): AA volume:page. Translations are my own.

⁴⁶ See, for instance Formosa, 'Evils, Wrongs and Dignity', p. 241, who believes that a theory of evil and a theory of moral wrongness should be compatible in the sense that everything a theorist considers evil, she should also consider morally wrong.

⁴⁷ Many people in the debate argue that an agent must inflict substantial harm on others to be considered evil – see Kekes, *Facing Evil*, p. 4, John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 1, Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, p. 3, Formosa, 'A Conception of Evil', Zachary Goldberg, 'Evil, 'Evil', and Taking Responsibility', in *Wozu ist das Böse gut?*, edited by Birgit Recki (Münster: Mentis, 2016), at pp. 17-36. Daniel Haybron, 'Moral Monsters and Saints', *The Monist*, 85:2, pp. 260-284, at p. 264, however, argues intention or wish to do so are sufficient. An evil agent

However, understanding evil as a distortion of communication matches at least some of our intuitions about evil, such as that evil is a matter of an agent's character, that evil is different from moral badness, that evil agents feel no remorse, and that they are beyond normal forms of criticism. Furthermore, this supposed vice Hegel calls 'evil' is more fundamental than other vices since an agent in its grasp cannot be criticized by others in ways even morally bad agents can. This vice extends to everything the agent does and thinks. It is thus more than a simple vice with a specific scope (such as consumption of food, the correct reaction when in danger, etc.). It is, rather, an account of the *possibility* of a specific form of evil than of what we think of as evil in itself. In this Hegel's account is similar to Kant who considers radical evil to be a freely chosen yet natural propensity to violate the moral law.⁴⁸ Evil here is a condition of the possibility of moral violations and of moral badness. For Kant, agents could be radical evil without ever doing anything morally bad (such as violating other's rights). Given human fallibility this is of course a purely hypothetical option, yet it is significant that evil for Kant (as well as for Hegel) does not necessarily imply moral badness.⁴⁹

With his provocative charge that Romanticist subjectivism is evil, Hegel aims to articulate the uneasiness we feel when interacting with an agent who is not susceptible to rational criticism in the same way that we are. Evil means that there is an essential randomness at the basis of agents' deliberation. Our abilities to communicate, engage in rational debate, and give and demand reasons, offer no or little protection against these agents. We are at their mercy or at the mercy of their conceptions of themselves in a way that we are not with non-evil agents. When interacting with evil agents there is something not up for debate that should be up for debate and that must be susceptible to rational criticism by others. Evil agents in Hegel's sense could easily commit evil acts as we ordinarily understand it. Moreover, all of them seem to have at least a latent evil to them, as they all take their subjectivity as overriding reason for action, and the content of their subjectivity is ultimately a matter of luck.

Conclusion

For Hegel evil is a relatively recent stage of human development. There was no evil in the pre-modern world since this period of the development of human culture lacked a notion of subjectivity robust enough for Romanticist subjectivism. However, once the condition for the possibility of evil –a fully developed subjectivity– is achieved, the possibility of evil will always be with us. There is however a remedy: subjectivity, in a rational modern society, is actualized in institutions, such as the State, art, religion, philosophy, and civil

does not necessarily have to cause harm to anyone. Hegel's position is even more non-standard insofar as his evil agent does not even need to intend to harm anyone or wish suffering upon anyone. I am grateful to Brian McElwee and Joe Saunders for this challenge.

⁴⁸ AA VI:32-7.

⁴⁹ The connection between evil and moral badness is, however, tighter for Kant than it is for Hegel. For Kant, there is still an internal connection between the concept of evil and that of moral wrongness, as the propensity to radical evil is precisely a propensity to prefer self-love over duty or to violate duty. I am grateful to Seiriol Morgan for discussion of this point.

society. Hegel's hope is that agents will come to realize that subjectivity is an internal *and external* actual. Subjectivity is something that modern individuals share and that enables them to establish a specifically modern society, a society that makes space for the actualization of everyone's subjectivity. Under the right external conditions actualizing one's subjectivity thus does not have to be something that requires that we turn away from society and from communication with other agents.

Hegel's theory of evil is challenging because he does not start his theorizing from the usual paradigms of evil. The main weakness of this theory is that he thinks of one specific problem that he finds within romantic philosophy, the idea that all normative content is rooted in one's authentic self and supposedly does not need further justification, as what evil is, regardless of how the ideal of an authentic self is actualized in an individual's life. The strength of his account is that he focuses on a deficiency that tends to be overlooked if we only ask about harm and bad intentions: it is an essential aspect of human interaction that we can discuss with an open mind what others have to say and that others can convince us and that we can convince them. Some agents do not attach the same significance to this open-mindedness and some lack it entirely as well as the capability to critically reflect about their beliefs and to distance themselves from them. These agents should concern us and there is something evil about them, but this is not all there is to this complex phenomenon.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ I am grateful to Seiriol Morgan, Joe Saunders, Zachary Goldberg, James Camien McGuiggan, Daniel Wenz, Brian McElwee, Chris Janaway, Christian Hofmann, Chris Macleod, Vera Flocke, Andre Grahle, Nathan Howard, Renaud Garner, Heather Peterson, David Woods, Stefan Kühnen, Thomas Oehl, Eva Schneider, Nadine Köhne and two anonymous referees for feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. I wish to express my special gratitude to Guido Kreis for awakening my interest in the philosophical significance of the relation between German Idealism and Romanticism in the first place. I am also grateful to Interdisciplinary Net, The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, the Southampton Ethics Centre, the German department of University College Cork, *Societas Ethica*, the International Network Hegel's Relevance, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Forschungsnetzwerk Transzendentalphilosophie/Deutscher Idealismus, and the Technische Universität Berlin as well as to David Woods, Juliana de Albuquerque and Eva Schneider for providing me with opportunities to present talks on Hegel and evil. I am grateful to my audiences at these occasions. Work on this paper has been financially supported by an Irish Research Council grant, and facilitated by the Philosophy departments of Trinity College Dublin and of the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen.

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On the Relevance of the Concept of Intrinsic Evil: Francisco Suárez and Contemporary Catholic Virtue Ethics Approaches

Nenad Polgar

The article explores the relevancy of the concept of intrinsic evil/intrinsically evil acts in contemporary Catholic theological ethics as a particular way of giving an account of (moral) evil. The argument proceeds in two steps. In the first step the author turns to Francisco Suárez as one of the first theologians who tried to deal with the concept of intrinsic evil in an extensive and systematic way. The point of this historical exploration is to determine the meanings of this concept as it started to appear more frequently in the ethical discourse. In the next step the author presents two contemporary positions within Catholic theological ethics, those of Joseph Selling and Dana Dillon. Although both authors are proponents of virtue ethics, they disagree fundamentally on the role of the concept of intrinsic evil within this approach. While Joseph Selling argues in favour of eliminating this concept from theological ethics, Dana Dillon posits that theological ethics cannot function without it. In the rest of the article, the author explores this disagreement through various ways in which the concept can be used, while taking into account the aforementioned meanings of the concept. In the end, the author sides with Joseph Selling, since the concept of intrinsic evil does not seem to be able to fulfil the role it was assigned within Catholic theological ethics.

Introduction

Conceptualising evil within particular disciplines and traditions presupposes, but also influences, the development of methodological tools and concepts. The reliability of these tools and concepts depends on how well they are able to bridge the gap between fundamental insights of these disciplines/traditions and contemporary challenges related to giving an account of evil. Every tradition has developed such tools and concepts, but religious traditions are struggling today in their attempts to provide *credible* accounts of evil. Therefore, the public focus has shifted away from theological explanations towards other disciplines in search of more reliable accounts of evil. Understanding why this happened is the first step for religious traditions in regaining their credibility when it comes to giving an account of evil; not because there is a need to compete with other

disciplines in this regard, but because valuable insights will be lost if religious traditions become irrelevant for this discourse.

When it comes to Catholic theological ethics a recent publication, entitled *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics* by Joseph Selling, has suggested that the inability of this discipline to *overcome* an act-oriented approach to ethical thinking in favour of developing a credible ethical vision (which needs to give an account of moral evil), might depend on the willingness to eliminate the notion of intrinsic evil.¹ On the other hand, a recently published article in *Horizons*, entitled *Debating Intrinsic Evil* by Dana Dillon, argued that such a goal-oriented approach, usually associated with virtue ethics, is unthinkable within the Catholic tradition without maintaining the concept of intrinsically evil acts.²

This article will, thus, explore the significance of the concept of intrinsic evil in a theological-ethical account of moral evil. By focusing on the historical roots of this concept, the article will try to draw out its meanings in order to, subsequently, pose the question whether the concept still contributes to the development of a credible account of moral evil and, consequently, to theological ethics. More precisely, the historical exploration of the concept of intrinsic evil will present the view of Francisco Suárez as one of the earliest theologians who discussed the problem of intrinsically evil acts explicitly, and somewhat systematically, within his novel theory of natural law.³ Having this range of possible meanings of the concept in mind, I will subsequently engage with the two authors mentioned earlier, Selling and Dillon, in order to try to discern the reasons behind the discrepancy in their evaluation of the importance of the concept of intrinsically evil acts.

Intrinsic Evil in Francisco Suárez's Thought

Considering Suárez's understanding of natural law and, especially, his static notion of human nature⁴, it is not surprising to discover that the concept of intrinsically evil acts has

¹ See Joseph A. Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 200.

² See Dana L. Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', *Horizons* 41:1 (2014), p. 130.

³ Francisco Suárez was not the first theologian who used the term intrinsically evil acts. John Dedek's excellent studies identify Durand of Saint Pourçain as the theologian who coined it and give an overview of the development of the concept in theological discussions in 12th and 13th century. See John Dedek, 'Moral Absolutes in the Predecessors of St. Thomas', *Theological Studies* 38:4 (1977), pp. 654-680; Id., 'Intrinsically Evil Acts: An Historical Study of the Mind of St. Thomas', *The Thomist* 43:3 (1979), pp. 385-413; Id., 'Intrinsically Evil Acts: The Emergence of the Doctrine', *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 50 (1983), pp. 191-226. For a critique of Dedek's studies, especially their methodology, see Matthew R. McWhorter, 'Intrinsic Moral Evils in the Middle Ages: Augustine as a Source of the Theological Doctrine', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29:4 (2016), pp. 409-423.

⁴ It is impossible to explain Suárez's notion of natural law and his view of human nature adequately here. For our purposes it will suffice to point out that in developing his understanding of natural law Suárez insists that it is immutable and universal both and in equal measure in its first principles and in its most concrete conclusions. In order to maintain this understanding, he sees the role of practical reason as simply deducing a conclusion from a relevant precept of the natural law in a given situation. Since these judgements presuppose only knowledge of human nature, more general

a place, and a significant one, within his ethical theory. In that regard, Suárez goes beyond the affirmation of the idea that there are classes of acts that are always morally wrong to commit, and actually uses the term itself (*actus intrinsece mali*).⁵ The author engages in the most extensive treatment of the topic in disputation 7 of his work *De bonitate et malitia humanorum actuum*.

In his usual style, Suárez first presents and comments on two opposing positions on the topic and finally arrives at the third with which he agrees. This position confirms that there are acts that are always evil and in the continuation of the disputation 7 he specifies it further through a number of assertions and corollaries. The first assertion Suárez makes is 'that some acts of the will are in themselves and in their objects evil prior to any will prohibiting them; they are independent of that will with respect to the aspect of evil'⁶. He argues that the assertion is firmly supported by tradition (Augustine, Aquinas, Scotus, Durandus, Cajetan, etc.), although, he notes, these authors do not agree on which acts ought to be counted among those that are evil in themselves. Therefore, Suárez proceeds by giving some examples of acts that are always evil and on this list he puts hatred of God, acting against conscience, or right reason, or a precept of a superior, adultery, lying, willingness to deceive, and willingness not to keep a promise.⁷ The reason,

precepts of natural law, and relevant circumstances of a given situation, the truth of a conclusion is identified with the correctness of a syllogism. For a more detailed treatment of Suárez's understanding of natural law, see Francisco Suárez, 'De legibus ac Deo legislatore', *Selections from Three Works*, edited by Thomas Pink (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2015), pp. 151-355; Paul Pace, 'Suárez and the Natural Law', *A Companion to Francisco Suárez*, edited by Victor M. Salas and Robert L. Fastiggi (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 274-296; James Gordley, 'Suárez and Natural Law', *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez*, Benjamin Hill and Henrik Lagerlund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 209-229.

⁵ The term appears in his treatise *De bonitate et malitia humanorum actuum* (henceforth *De bonitate*) but also in *De legibus ac Deo legislatore* (henceforth *De legibus*). See Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4 (Paris: Vivès, 1856), tract. 3, disp. 7, sect. 1. n. 13, p. 375; *Ibid.*, vol. 5, lib. 2, cap. 7, n. 5, p. 113. (For the English translation of *De legibus* I am relying on Thomas Pink's translation in his *Selection from Three Works* (see the previous footnote), but the references will be given always to the Vivès edition). From the fact that the term appears only once in the whole disputation, Servais Pinckaers concludes that it only began to become a part of theological discussions. See Servais Pinckaers, *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), p. 219.

⁶ Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, tract. 3, disp. 7, sect. 1, n. 6, p. 373: 'Aliquos actus voluntatis ex se, et ex vi suorum obiectorum esse malos ante omnem voluntatem prohibentem et independentem ab illa quoad rationem malitiae.' (For English translation of *De bonitate* I am relying on Sydney Penner's translation, which can be found on his webpage: <http://www.sydneypenner.ca/SuarTr.shtml>, but the references will be given always to the Vivès edition).

⁷ See *ibid.*, tract. 3, disp. 7, n. 7, p. 373. Similarly, in *De legibus*, when writing about the third-level precepts of natural law, Suárez writes: 'Other conclusions require more reflection, of a sort not easily within the capacity of all, as is the case with the inferences that fornication is intrinsically evil, that usury is unjust, that lying can never be justified, and the like.' *Ibid.*, vol. 5, lib. 2, cap. 7, n. 5, p. 113: 'Aliae majori indigent discursu, et non facile omnibus notae, ut fornicationem esse intrinsece malam, usuram esse injustam, mendacium nunquam posse honestari, et similia.' It seems that in this quotation Suárez is using the term 'intrinsically evil' as a synonym for 'unjust', or 'can never be

according to Suárez, why these acts are intrinsically evil consists in their objects and the fact that the will receives its goodness or malice from its object.

It is instructive to stop here for a moment and to consider the kinds of acts that Suárez puts on the list of intrinsically evil acts. Firstly, what is immediately evident is that the listed acts are certainly not specified in the same way or with the same or similar amount of detail. For instance, there is a big difference between specifying an act as 'acting against right reason' and 'adultery'. While the former is, technically, a formal description of every morally wrong act, the latter is a specific description of an act combining both formal and material elements.⁸

Secondly, Suárez's list also contains an act against a precept of a superior and willingness not to keep a promise. These are both kinds of acts that are problematic for the point Suárez wanted to demonstrate since he does not seem to consider them absolutely bad in all circumstances. In the case of the former, a precept of a superior ought to be followed *unless* the superior lapses into tyranny⁹, which shows that Suárez does not consider the act morally wrong in itself or in its object.¹⁰ In the case of the latter, he shifts the discussion and talks about God as someone who would never fail to uphold a given promise and this makes it unsuitable as an example of an intrinsically evil act, due to the change of the agent.¹¹

Both of these cases then confirm that Suárez's notion of intrinsically evil acts certainly does not mean 'irrespective of the context, intention, and circumstances', as it is often understood today. The designation 'intrinsic' is then seemingly nothing but a reference to a judgement of right reason pronouncing 'x is in conformity/disconformity with human nature' where x is a concrete and contextualised act.¹² In this sense, one could

justified'. One has to be careful then not to read in his text the specific meaning or meanings that the term 'intrinsic evil' acquired later on.

⁸ The prohibition against adultery is called a synthetic norm (do not commit adultery) in contemporary theological ethics, since it combines a moral judgement and a material description of the act.

⁹ See Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, lib. 3, cap. 4, n. 6, p. 186.

¹⁰ Of course, Suárez might argue here that the object on an act against the will of a superior who lapsed into tyranny is not the object he writes about here (acting against a precept of a superior), but one cannot discern this from the way he formulated the object of an intrinsically evil act in this case. This means that either the act can be morally right in some circumstances or it is not a good example of an act intrinsically evil in its object. As will become evident later on, such imprecisions when it comes to defining objects of intrinsically evil acts is one of the main reasons why the concept became confusing and unclear.

¹¹ See Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, tract. 3, disp. 7, sect. 1, n. 7, p. 373. The reason why he shifts the discussion to God is to show that the malice of willingness not to keep a promise does not depend on (divine) will, but on the fact that this object is evil *per se*. This is a valid point, but the shift in context complicates its application to human affairs. Namely, there is a major difference between saying that God would never break a promise and that human beings should never break a promise, because the way God makes promises and the way human beings make promises differs substantially. So, either objects of these two acts ought to be specified differently or, less likely, the object here refers to the end of an act. Neither of these options, however, can demonstrate Suárez's point that there are some acts whose objects are intrinsically evil in a meaningful way.

¹² See Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study: Volume II: From Suárez to Rousseau* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 40.

exchange Suárez's term 'intrinsically evil act' with the term 'morally wrong act' without losing anything of its meaning. Alternatively, his concept of intrinsically evil acts could refer to acts that have been specified in detail in order to include all morally relevant elements, as in the case of adultery or acting against the precept of a superior, unless he lapses into tyranny (plus any other circumstance that might justify one in acting against a precept of a superior). Such a concept of intrinsically evil acts would not cause any problems in contemporary debates, but it would also be largely useless as a methodological tool.

Nature of Intrinsically Evil Acts

After asserting that there are intrinsically evil acts Suárez focuses in the third corollary on the nature of intrinsically evil acts. They are not such, he explains, because evil is somehow joined to or inherent in their physical entity, but because they have evil conjoined to them via their objects. Among such acts, Suárez differentiates between two kinds: (1) those that have evil conjoined to them 'by the force of a direct and physical tendency' and (2) those that are evil 'from an indirect tendency'¹³.

A number of interesting points are raised in this text. Firstly, there seems to be a certain contradiction between Suárez's explanation of the nature of intrinsically evil acts and his explanation of the first kind of intrinsically evil acts. In the former, Suárez categorically denies that acts could be intrinsically evil on the basis of their physical entity, but in the latter he explains the relation between acts and intrinsically evil objects in terms of a direct and physical tendency. At first glance, this might strike one as a contradiction, unless there is a way to distinguish between 'physical entity' and 'direct and physical tendency'. However, Suárez did not pursue this point further explicitly. What Suárez probably tried to express here is the idea that there are acts whose objects have inherent ends that are normative for these acts, and in relation to which any other end an agent might have in performing them is accidental and remote.¹⁴ Consequently, to perform such an act without respecting its inherent end would mean to engage in an intrinsically evil act. Leaving aside the issue of natural teleology for the moment, the fact that he calls this

¹³ Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, tract. 3, disp. 7, sect. 1, n. 13, p. 375: 'Nam quidam habent adiunctam malitiam ex vi directae, et physicae tendentiae in obiectum, quod contingit quando vel obiectum habet omnino immutabilem conditionem illam ex qua oritur turpi tudo, ut est in odio Dei, aut quando in ipso obiecto directe volito proponitur illa conditio, ex qua oritur illa turpitudine, ut est in voluntate mentiendi, furandi [...].Aliquando vero non adiungitur malitia ex vi directae vel physicae tendentiae, sed tantum ex indirecta: ut cum aliquis vult hanc rem accipere, vel ad hanc mulierem accedere, et in obiecto volito non ponit conditionem non suae, vel alienae.'

¹⁴ See Pinckaers, *The Pinckaers Reader*, p. 222. Pinckaers argues further: 'Without doubt, Suárez had not yet established a connection between this difference of ends and the distinction between *finis operis* and *finis operantis*, but the idea is clearly expressed and will at once be taken up. We should note that although certain texts of St. Thomas could lend themselves to Suárez's distinction, St. Thomas in no way gave them such a meaning, to the detriment of finality, in his analysis of the moral act.' Ibid. Perhaps the first theologian who explicitly formulated this idea is Durand of Saint Pourçain. He argued that God cannot dispense from those precepts whose matter (*a materia talium praeceptorum*) is inseparable from the *ratio debiti*. See Dedek, 'Intrinsically Evil Acts: The Emergence', p. 221.

tendency of objects towards evil direct and physical, is a very unfortunate decision that might easily, as it did, turn into designating some physical acts¹⁵ as intrinsically evil.

An interesting case in this context is the seventh commandment that prohibits lying. Suárez defines lying as 'the disaccord between the words and the mind'¹⁶; that is, as what I called a physical act. Furthermore, lying is certainly one of his paradigmatic examples of intrinsically evil acts. However, if intrinsically evil acts, as Suárez claims, do not refer to acts whose evil is somehow joined to or inherent in their physical entity, then how can he possibly claim that 'the disaccord between the words and the mind' is an example of an intrinsically evil act? In other words, his example either does not meet his own definition of what can or cannot qualify as an intrinsically evil act, or his notion of the 'physical entity (of an act)' means something entirely different.

Secondly, this relation between objects and their inherent ends is not a new idea; a number of Scholastic writers speculated about it in the context of divine dispensations, i.e. whether God can re-direct, as it were, material acts (that are directed to evil inherent ends) so that they do not tend towards evil anymore, but towards God or the final end. In relation to that, Scotus posed the crucial question regarding these acts/objects by asking whether there are some acts that can never be re-directed from their 'inherent end'. His reply, based on his understanding of the natural law in the strict sense, was modest since it included only one act on the list of such acts – hatred of God.¹⁷ Suárez, on the other hand, recognises the uniqueness of this act¹⁸, but enlarges the list significantly.

Thirdly, Suárez claims that acts of his second category of intrinsically evil acts tend only indirectly towards intrinsically evil objects. Therefore, he argues, they can become morally good, if the conditions in the object were to change. It is clear from this that Suárez is applying here his theory on the possibility of change in the subject matter of an object to which a precept of natural law is applied so that a given precept would not apply anymore,

¹⁵ Although it is impossible to discern with absolute certainty what Suárez means by 'physical entity' of an act, what I mean by 'physical act' is its material aspect that corresponds to the question 'what is done or omitted (materially)'; for instance, a sexual act, telling a falsehood, waving a hand, breaking a promise, remaining silent, cutting (someone) with a knife, giving money (to someone), etc. All of these examples can be specified to a lesser or higher degree and they already have some kind of reference to an agent who performs them, but this reference is not sufficiently specified so that a moral judgement could be made.

¹⁶ Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, lib. 2, cap. 15, n. 23, p. 152.

¹⁷ See Allan B. Wolter and William A. Frank, *Duns Scotus: On the Will and Morality* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), pp. 57-64. Scotus reaches this conclusion because, for him, hatred of God is the only act in which generic (object-based) and specific (circumstantial) goodness merge, since there is no logical possibility to claim that an act of hatred of God could be directed to a good end.

¹⁸ Suárez recognises the uniqueness of the act of hatred of God, but he relates it to the issue of ignorance/knowledge of what one is doing: 'If the evil is so obvious that one cannot be ignorant of it, as is perhaps with the hatred of God, that act could not be a human act without being evil. Perhaps it is for that reason that Scotus said that this act is especially intrinsically evil.' Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, vol. 4, tract. 3, disp. 7, sect. 1, n. 13, p. 375: 'Si tamen tam patens sit malitia, ut non possit ignorari, ut fortasse est in odio Dei, non poterit ille actus esse humanus, quin sit malus; et ideo forte Scotus dixit hunc actum esse specialiter intrinsece malum.'

which means that the natural law is preserved in its immutability.¹⁹ However, if one were to compare Suárez and Aquinas on this point, one would notice that Suárez considers as intrinsically evil not only those acts that have an intrinsic deformity (Aquinas calls these acts *malum secundum se*)²⁰, but also acts whose deformity is such that it could disappear if object-forming circumstances change.

In summary, one can clearly see the early stage of the development of the concept of intrinsically evil acts in Suárez's account. Unfortunately, already at this stage of its development, the concept seemed to have suffered from a number of inconsistencies that threatened it to such an extent that it might become completely incoherent and useless.. In effect, Suárez claims that the category of intrinsically evil acts spans from those acts that tend directly and physically towards intrinsically evil objects, through those whose objects are deformed (but could change), and all the way to acts that are intrinsically evil because they are instances of acting against right reason. Between these he also inserts acts such as adultery and breaking a promise and all of this shows, in my opinion, that it is almost impossible to discern what the defining characteristics of intrinsically evil acts are, except the fact that they are instances of acts against right reason, i.e. they are morally wrong. If this is so, then Suárez's engagement with the concept of intrinsically evil acts seems to be largely an attempt to strengthen the notion of objective morality amidst the theological struggle between essentialism and voluntarism and he does so by using a concept that he believes to be based firmly in the tradition.

That this problem of conceptual confusion about the term intrinsically evil acts has only become more acute in later times is evident when one fast-forwards from Suárez's time through the manualist tradition to contemporary times. In recent years, theologians who have worked on this term, managed to isolate an astonishing number of its meanings. For instance, in his taxonomy of views on the concept of intrinsic evil, James Bretzke identified five different meanings of the term²¹, while Werner Wolbert lists nine possible meanings.²²

Nevertheless, one could rightly claim that the concept of intrinsic evil has never been defended more strongly in Catholic theological ethics than in the second half of the twentieth century. During the last century the concept of intrinsic evil has started to appear more and more often in those documents of the teaching office of the Catholic Church that deal with some aspects of sexual ethics. Finally, the term itself was incorporated in the encyclical letter *Veritatis splendor*, where it was argued that 'in teaching the existence of intrinsically evil acts, the Church accepts the teaching of Sacred Scripture'.²³ This usage of

¹⁹ For instance, in the case of the Old Testament prophet Hosea, Suárez argues, the precept against fornication has not been abolished, because 'God has power to transfer to a man dominium over a woman without her consent' which makes the intercourse not an act of fornication but a marital act. See *ibid.*, vol. 5, lib. 2, cap. 15, n. 20, p. 149.

²⁰ See Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, edited by Raymundi Spiazzi (Turin: Marietti, 1956), quod. 9, q. 7, a. 2.

²¹ See James Bretzke, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', *Horizons* 41:1 (2014), pp. 128-129.

²² Werner Wolbert, 'Tendencies in Catholic Moral Theology as Reflected in *Veritatis Splendor*', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 47:1-2 (2000), pp. 241-244.

²³ John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, online at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html (accessed 2018-04-24), n. 81. Earlier documents referred to the concept of intrinsic evil by other names. For instance, *Casti*

the concept in *Veritatis splendor* seem to have been inspired largely by similar motives that guided Francisco Suárez a few centuries ago. Namely, in both cases the concept served to ground claims of objectivity of particular moral judgements, while reinforcing it further by appeals to the tradition in order to combat extreme essentialist and voluntarist tendencies in theology (Suárez) or the perceived threat of moral relativism and proportionalists' vision of renewing theological ethics (*Veritatis splendor*).²⁴

With this in mind, I will turn now to the two contemporary approaches to virtue ethics of which one shares concerns and supports efforts of *Veritatis splendor* and traditionalists (Dana Dillon), while the other finds them misguided (Joseph Selling).

Intrinsic Evil and Virtue Ethics: Two Approaches

Both Joseph Selling and Dana Dillon argue in favour of accepting goal-oriented virtue ethics as the main approach of Catholic theological ethics. Interestingly enough, the authors also agree that act analysis ought to complement virtue ethics, i.e. that virtue ethics in itself, is not enough for a comprehensive approach to ethics, since issues related to behaviour, to what is right and what is wrong, are also pertinent and need to be reflected on and answered.²⁵ However, the two authors disagree on the role of the concept of intrinsically evil acts within this the act analysis part of the comprehensive approach to ethics.

For Selling, it is precisely the continuous adherence to this and similar concepts within the official moral doctrine of the teaching office of the Catholic Church and within theological ethics in general, that hinders the renewal of the discipline along the lines of the goal-oriented approach. Furthermore, Selling argues that one of the essential tasks roles of the concept of intrinsic evil – identification of morally wrong acts – can just as easily be

Connubii (1930) uses 'intrinsically contrary to nature' (n. 54), 'intrinsically dishonest (or vicious)' (n. 54), and 'evil in its intrinsic nature' (n. 61); *Humanae vitae* (1968) follows it by using the term 'intrinsically dishonest' (n. 14); *Persona humana* (1975) employs 'intrinsically disordered' (n. 8); *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984) uses 'intrinsically grave' (n. 17) and 'intrinsically illicit' (n. 18); finally, *Veritatis splendor* (1993) opts for 'intrinsically evil' (n. 80). As one can see, these variations on the theme could be a topic of research in themselves, because it is far from clear that the exact same idea is expressed by them.

²⁴ John Paul II was certainly not an isolated voice in promoting the usage of the concept of intrinsic evil in contemporary theological ethics. In fact many have argued that in *Veritatis splendor* he championed the cause of the so-called traditionalist school (especially the New Natural Law theorists), who, similarly to the so-called revisionists, were engaged in the project of renewing theological ethics, but without challenging any normative judgements that the teaching office of the Catholic Church might have reached. Expectedly, they reacted favourably to the promulgation of *Veritatis splendor*. See Germain Grisez, 'Revelation versus Dissent', *Considering Veritatis Splendor*, edited by John Wilkins (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), pp. 1-8; Martin Rhonheimer, 'Intrinsically Evil Acts and the Moral Viewpoint: Clarifying a Central Teaching of *Veritatis splendor*', *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, edited by Joseph A. DiNoia and Romanus Cessario (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1999), pp. 161-193.

²⁵ See Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, pp. 7-12; Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', pp. 130-131.

fulfilled by classifying some kinds of acts as inappropriate for living virtuously.²⁶ For Dillon, on the other hand, 'virtue ethics ultimately does not work as an authentic way of handing on the Catholic moral tradition unless it includes an affirmation of the concept of intrinsically evil acts'²⁷.

Recalling the range of possible meanings of the term intrinsically evil acts already present in Suárez's writings, the most pertinent question is what the two authors have in mind when taking a position for or against the usage of this concept in contemporary theological ethics. In this sense, Selling refers to the widespread understanding of intrinsically evil acts as those acts that are supposed to be morally wrong on the basis of their object, regardless of any (further) intention or circumstances. However, the problem with this understanding, he continues, is that it is never entirely clear how the object of an act was specified, i.e. whether it refers to a physical act, circumstantiated physical act, circumstantiated physical act with some notion of intention, or something else.²⁸ In other words, it is not clear, as we already saw in Suárez, whether the specification of the object is trying to describe an act or already pronounce a moral judgement on it.²⁹ This being so, the usage of the concept obfuscates the underlying moral methodology and hinders, according to Selling, 'our ability to have a coherent ethical conversation'³⁰. Since the renewal of theological ethics depends also on this ability, Selling's reason for excluding the concept of intrinsically evil acts from theological ethics is clear.

Dillon, on the other hand, seems to reject any understanding of intrinsically evil acts as physical acts and defines them as 'types of acts that, by their nature, cannot be ordered to ends compatible with the Christian life'³¹. In order to explain what this 'nature' of types of acts is, Dillon refers to Aquinas and uses his notion of 'the substance of the act', which, she claims, consists of what the agent did and why he/she did it, including the circumstances without which these two cannot be understood.³² Thus, for her, examples of

²⁶ See Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, pp. 200.

²⁷ Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', p. 130.

²⁸ See Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, pp. 20-22.

²⁹ This distinction between describing and evaluating is important since it clarifies what is meant by a specific usage of the concept of intrinsic evil. However, while acknowledging this distinction, one should also keep in mind that description and evaluation are not simply successive acts of moral analysis. Instead, describing an act in the context of a moral analysis – for instance, to kill a person – already picks out those elements of an event that have a potentially evaluative significance and eliminates others as irrelevant (for instance, that a person was tall or short). Hence, when describing an act in the context of a moral analysis, one has already begun (but not completed!) the process of morally evaluating it.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

³¹ Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', p. 137.

³² See *ibid.*, p. 134. Dillon refers to four articles of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 7, from which, she claims, her notion of 'the substance of the act' is derived. However, the text of article 4 of this question refutes her claim that the substance of the act consists of what the agent did and why he/she did it: 'Now, the motive and object of the will is the end. Therefore that circumstance is the most important of all which touches the act on the part of the end, viz. the circumstance 'why': and the second in importance, is that which touches the very substance of the act, viz. the circumstance 'what he did'.' Thomas Aquinas, 'Summa theologiae I-II', edited by Joseph Kenny, online at <http://dhsprory.org/thomas> (accessed 2017-11-05), q. 7, a. 4, *resp.* This text differentiates between what is the most important in the act (i.e. 'why') and the very substance of the act (i.e. 'what'), which

intrinsically evil acts are adultery, murder, apostasy, and the types of acts enumerated in *Gaudium et spes* 27.³³ Interestingly enough, Dillon laments the fact that sexual sins, described in overly physicalist terms, have been associated often with intrinsically evil acts, but she does not explicitly say whether she considers such acts intrinsically evil or not.

A Critique of the Usage of the Concept of Intrinsic Evil

When the positions of the two authors are compared and their divergent understandings of the concept of intrinsic evil are taken into account, their opposing positions on the importance of the concept of intrinsic evil within Catholic theological ethics might lose some of their edge. Namely, one cannot imagine that Selling would argue in favour of moral re-evaluation of adultery, murder, or apostasy as a part of his suggestion to dispose of the notion of intrinsically evil acts. Furthermore, it is unclear why Dillon would insist on keeping the notion of intrinsically evil acts, if these can just as well be classified as morally inappropriate acts within a Christian community. However, a clearer picture of both the two authors' understanding of the concept of intrinsic evil and its (ir)relevancy for theological ethics, might emerge through a further analysis of their positions.

This analysis will proceed by specifying three ways in which the notion of intrinsic evil can be used and looking at the two authors' positions through the lens of this categorization: 1) As a methodological tool, 2) as a result of an ethical analysis, and/or 3) as a pedagogical tool.

Intrinsic Evil as a Methodological Tool

By referring to the notion of intrinsic evil as a methodological tool I am raising the question whether this notion has a place in normative analyses of acts within theological ethics. Such analyses presuppose the development and usage of conceptual tools that help us identify and engage with potentially morally relevant elements of an act or a class of acts for the purpose of reaching an ethical judgement. The pertinent question in this regard is whether the concept of intrinsic evil performs a similar or equivalent function as concepts such as circumstances, end (intention), object, principle, rule, criterion, context, material norm, etc.

On this issue, Selling warns about the danger the notion of intrinsic evil represents insofar as it hinders meaningful ethical discussion, while Dillon seems, at least implicitly, to favour this usage. More precisely, Dillon rejects the objection against the concept of intrinsically evil acts which insists on 'the suggestion that what the agent intends can change the meaning and identity of the act'³⁴. If this objection is not valid, as she seems to think, then the concept of intrinsically evil acts can be used as a methodological tool that replaces the careful consideration of intention in the ethical analysis of an act. However, in this she is contradicting herself (since she claimed earlier that intention, 'the why', is part

seems to suggest that the 'why' is not a part of the substance of the act. However, in case there is any doubt left, Aquinas continues further down: 'Although the end is not part of the substance of the act, yet it is the most important cause of the act, inasmuch as it moves the agent to act [emphasis added].' *Ibid.*, q. 7, a. 4, ad. 2.

³³ See Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', pp. 134-137.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 135.

of the substance of an act) and taking a position opposed to Aquinas, for whom the specification of a human action begins with the consideration of the end.³⁵

The main problem and the reason why the two authors disagree on this point is because the term intention can signify two different things. Firstly, it can signify the intention towards the end and in that sense one has to know what the intention is in order to specify an act or a class of acts.³⁶ Secondly, the intention can refer to a personal reason (motive) one has for performing an already specified act; what Suárez and the manualist called *finis operantis*.³⁷ When it comes to this latter meaning of the term intention, I think Dillon is right in claiming that the intention cannot change the identity of the act, but this is only so if we assume that the identity of the act is already known. Selling, on the other hand, is concerned that assumptions of this kind are not very helpful for ethical analysis as they are imprecise and too wide in scope. Thus, they risk lumping together all killings as murders and all takings of what belongs to others as thefts.

Does this amount to both authors being right, once the necessary distinctions have been introduced? The answer to this question depends on where the boundaries of normative analyses of acts in theological ethics ought to be drawn. For Selling the normative analysis of acts concerns their identity and classification; the reasons why an act is (not) classified as intrinsically evil/inappropriate. Hence, for him, the concept of intrinsic evil has no place at this level of ethical deliberation. Dillon, on the other hand, does not seem to be interested in the reasons why certain acts are identified as intrinsically evil, but rather focuses on the fact that they are intrinsically evil and cannot be re-described. In other words, she glosses over this more fundamental level of ethical deliberation and engages with the analysis of acts once their moral objects have already been specified. Since most theologians would identify this kind of analysis with the work of a confessor, not an ethicist engaged in normative analysis of human acts, her usage of the concept of intrinsic evil does not fit into this first category of using the concept as a methodological tool.

Bearing that in mind, it still might be worthwhile to ask exactly how would the usage of the concept of intrinsically evil acts as a methodological tool look like in Dillon's approach. The answer to this question depends on whether her notion of intrinsically evil acts is closer to acts examples of murder and adultery, on the one hand, or speaking a falsehood and masturbation, on the other. In other words, the question is whether what qualifies as murder and adultery, on the one hand, or speaking a falsehood and masturbation, on the other, is something that can never be re-described by taking into account the intention of the agent.

As I pointed out earlier, one of the problems with the notion of intrinsically evil acts is that one can never be entirely sure what kinds of acts (in terms of the level and manner of specification) this concept incorporates, i.e. what does it mean to establish that an act is intrinsically evil. Furthermore, Dillon's argument that intrinsically evil acts have been specified within the Catholic tradition in such a way as to allow for some consideration of the agent is also not very helpful., Although such a consideration favours

³⁵ See Thomas Aquinas, 'Summa theologiae I-II', q. 1., a. 3.

³⁶ Example: Taking something that belongs to another (what is done) in order to feed the starving family (intention). Without knowing the latter, we can only wonder what the former amounts to or, worse, assume it is an act of theft.

³⁷ Example: Committing a theft in order to buy a present for a dear friend.

the former kind of description of acts (murder and adultery) in the contemporary perspective, there are plenty of voices within the Catholic tradition that would have no issue with categorising speaking a falsehood or masturbation as moral objects, i.e. as taking into account the relevant intention of the agent.

Due to its ambiguity, the task of specifying what the concept of intrinsic evil means, *rightly understood*³⁸, seems extremely difficult to achieve. Since this severely affects its ability to take on the role of a methodological tool, most contemporary theological ethicists opt for alternative concepts in their analysis of human acts.

Intrinsic Evil as a Result of an Ethical Analysis

The usage of the notion of intrinsic evil as a result of an ethical analysis explores its viability as a way of expressing ethical judgements on particular acts or classes of acts. This usage of the concept of intrinsic evil is very much associated with the *fontes moralitatis* approach of the late manualists. If the concept of intrinsic evil is used in this sense, its role in ethical discourse would be comparable to concepts such as moral object, synthetic norm, duty, nature, and law, if these are understood as imposing a clear ethical demand.

As I noted earlier, the two authors prefer to use different notions when it comes to expressing ethical judgements (intrinsically evil acts for Dillon, inappropriate or disproportionate acts for Selling). The reason why the authors prefer to use different terms here consists in the role the concept of intrinsically evil acts ought to play in a community. Dillon emphasises that this concept is pivotal in a community's striving for a shared sense of the ends and purposes of life and for avoiding the conclusion or attitude that how such ends and purposes are pursued ultimately depends on either individual choice or on the particular situation in which an agent finds himself/herself.³⁹ Selling, on the other hand, emphasises that this process of communal discernment of shared goods and purposes is never completed and that the description/evaluation of acts is of secondary importance for it and necessarily shares the provisional character of the whole process of ethical discernment.⁴⁰ These are both important concerns that show vividly why the authors prefer different terms. However, I argue that while the usage of the term inappropriate acts does not deny the first concern, the usage of the term intrinsically evil acts, in Dillon's usage and in the tradition to which she appeals, cannot adequately take into consideration the second concern.

This inadequacy is perhaps one of the main reasons why the concept of intrinsic evil acquired so many different meanings (as seen in Suárez's thought) and why using it as a way of expressing ethical judgements, in my opinion, turns too easily to authoritative pronouncements as a way of settling ethical disputes. This turn to authoritative pronouncements might be explained by the fact that even within the Catholic tradition and community there is often a plurality of views on what a certain object/act is/means and how it should be evaluated. In such a situation, the turn to authoritative pronouncements leaves the impression of certainty of an ethical judgement, but only by skipping necessary steps of the process of reaching that judgement and by imposing definitions of objects of acts 'from above'.

³⁸ See Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', p. 137.

³⁹ See Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', p. 139.

⁴⁰ See Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, pp. 21-22.

Intrinsic Evil as a Pedagogical Tool

Finally, using the notion of intrinsic evil as a pedagogical tool refers to its viability as a means of teaching an individual or a community about moral right and wrong, by using examples of classes of acts, and about moral good and bad, insofar as one can point out values that these classes of acts are endangering. In this sense, the notion of intrinsic evil, i.e. the examples of intrinsically evil acts, would serve as a sort of 'danger' sign for an individual or a community.

Both authors seem to recognise the importance of some sort of concept that would perform this role of a 'danger' sign for an individual or a community, insofar as they acknowledge the process of moral development. Hence, one cannot talk to children about moral methodology, nor can one expect the majority of people to be versed in nuances of normative act analysis. Dillon makes this point by insisting that the necessary condition of a community's ability to form virtuous characters is precisely its ability to first teach its members about intrinsically evil acts. Failing to meet this condition, she argues, would disintegrate a community's shared sense of what would constitute a virtuous character, as well as ends and purposes of virtuous life. This, in turn, precludes not only meaningful discussions on morality within a community, but ultimately leads to its inability to sustain itself as a community.⁴¹

At first glance, Dillon's argument might strike one as disturbing insofar as it seems to claim that a community's ability to sustain itself depends on teaching its members about intrinsically evil acts. However, there is nothing particularly radical about it, provided one keeps in mind its pedagogical context. Given this context, the argument merely points out a truism that a community cannot hope to sustain itself through generations if it does not devise ways for how to teach its members about its identity and its values, starting from the most basic notions of what one ought to do and what to avoid doing.

There are, nevertheless, two issues about Dillon's argument that, I think, Selling would raise. The first concerns using the notion of intrinsic evil in this context, as opposed to calling these acts inappropriate or simply morally wrong. In other words, does the notion of intrinsic evil⁴², as Dillon understands it, add anything to a community's pedagogical function that might be missed by using these alternative notions? Of course, this argument can work both ways. Hence, if nothing is lost by ditching the notion of intrinsic evil, Dillon could argue, there is also nothing to be gained by using a different term.

The crucial difference between using the term intrinsic evil or one of the alternative terms in the pedagogical context emerges only when one takes into account the two other ways in which the notion of intrinsic evil can be used (as a methodological tool and as a result of an ethical analysis). Although these three ways of using the notion can be distinguished, they are nevertheless interrelated. Because of this, it does make a difference which notion is employed in the pedagogical context, since one would expect it to also have an impact on the Church's approach to, and vision of, ethical discourse in general. Since the notion of intrinsic evil has a tendency to absolutize the moral judgements that it

⁴¹ See Dillon, 'Debating Intrinsic Evil', p. 140.

⁴² 'Rightly understood, intrinsically evil acts name types of acts that, by their nature, cannot be ordered to ends compatible with the Christian life.' Ibid., p. 137.

expresses and to simplify the ethical discourse by insisting on the certainty of these judgements, it creates the wrong impression on how these judgements are reached. Consequently, Selling argues, the idea that morality is simply about following commandments and rules (what one ought to do or avoid) proceeds logically from this approach while the consideration of what one is trying to achieve in the first place (ends and goals of moral life) becomes secondary or unimportant.⁴³ Perhaps the most vivid proof of this is the fact that there was next to no discussion of virtuous living in theological ethics for centuries between the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁴

On the other hand, an approach such as Selling's would benefit from an explanation of how members of a community could be taught about inappropriate or disproportionate acts. Since he argues that their categorisation as inappropriate or disproportionate acts shares the provisional character of the whole process of ethical discernment, this understanding should somehow be reflected also in how one learns about such acts. Apart from the fact that this necessitates a re-thinking of the Church's pedagogical tasks, it also raises the question whether the provisional character of this categorisation can adequately express the seriousness of a concrete ethical obligation.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the emergence and usage of the concept of intrinsic evil ought to be viewed as an attempt to give an account of (moral) evil within a particular religious tradition and its discipline of theological ethics. Since its beginning and up until the second part of the twentieth century, this discipline has been, as James Keenan argues, 'nearly exclusively concerned with sins, that is, with particular actions determined to be wrong'.⁴⁵ To this one should add the conceptual confusion surrounding this term, which is present already in the thought of Francisco Suárez, as well as the context of the struggle between essentialism and voluntarism in which it was coined, in order to get the sense of heavy theological baggage that this term is burdened with. Consequently, continuous insistence on this term risks being overwhelmed by this baggage or using the term in a simplistic way. This being so, one starts to wonder whether one of its essential roles, the affirmation of objective morality, could not be served better by an alternative theological term.

These insights can be perhaps fully appreciated only within a more adequate theological view of morality 'as a response to the Spirit's movements in our lives'⁴⁶, or what is today known as a goal-oriented (Selling) or virtue ethics (Dillon) approach. As Dillon rightly notices, the widespread acceptance of virtue ethics within Catholic theological ethics does not negate the need for a serious reflection on human acts and behaviour. However, the results of this reflection cannot be simply taken over from tradition as if the

⁴³ See Selling, *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*, pp. 199-200.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 84-119.

⁴⁵ James F. Keenan, 'History, Roots, and Innovations: A Response to the Engaging Protestants', *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals*, edited by Reinhard Hütter and Theodor Dieter (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 266.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

only point of using a method in theological ethics is to find a better way to ground conclusions that have already been reached.

One of the signs of such uncritical treatment of results of previous reflections is the usage of the concept of intrinsic evil, as I tried to show through the three ways in which the concept can be used. Perhaps the most important insight that came out of this analysis is that these three ways of using the concept cannot be separated from each other, which adds to the confusion about what an author who uses it is trying to express. This, in turn, risks arguing for, holding, and teaching, unexamined views whose persistence depends on the evocative force of the concept of intrinsically evil acts, but that cannot withstand a closer scrutiny. As a way of giving an account of evil, such an approach draws out the boundaries of moral evil in an inadequate way. Hence, relying on it does not only threaten the credibility of the discipline and tradition from which it speaks, but acts as a hindrance to genuine ethical analysis.

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Political Decay and Political Arcadianism

Ronnie Hjorth

An account of evil in classical political theory is the concept of evil government. The notion of political decay from good to evil government or to anarchy, the absence of government, among classical political theorists represents both a moral and a political problem. This essay argues that political decay remains a perennial problem because the political condition itself involves the seeds to its own destruction. Moreover, it is claimed that the nostalgic longing to a glorious past for nations or peoples risks turning into what is here labelled 'political arcadianism', fostering futile attempts to return to past conditions. The argument is that political arcadianism when focusing on the imagined past rather than the present is a possible cause of political decay.

And in general all men really seek what is good, not what was customary with their forefathers.

*Aristotle*¹

Because I cannot hope to turn again,

Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something,

Upon which to rejoice

*T.S. Eliot*²

Introduction

An account of evil in political theory is the concept of evil government which is often contrasted to that of good government. A famous illustration of this is Ambrogio

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, edited by H. Rackham (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 1269a.

² T.S. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday*, in *The Wasteland and Other Poems* (New York: Harcourt, 1962 [1930]), p. 58.

Lorenzetti's frescoes in *Palazzo Pubblico* in Sienna painted in 1338-1340.³ The fresco entitled *Allegory of Good Government* illustrates the Thomist view of good government placing the ancient female representation of justice at the centre balancing a pair of scales, and picturing Divine Justice in the image of angels in the pans of the scales dispensing distributive and commutative justice. Central to the painting is the word 'Concordia', written on a speaker's tribune and symbolising the ideal of government in concord, harmony and balance, which is characteristic of the classical natural law doctrine. The contrasting image is that of evil government and satanic power where the pair of scales is broken. Hence, there is a mixing of political and legal doctrine with a theological dogma of good and evil. An equally famous expression is Percy Shelley's poem *The Masque of Anarchy* (1832) portraying anarchy as the end of government:

Last came Anarchy: he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

For the classical political theorist the term political decay symbolises a movement from a good system of government to an evil one or to anarchy, the absence of government. Political decay implies moral decay and is clearly regarded a moral evil. For most of modern and contemporary political thought, the categories of good and evil are not essential. Nevertheless, it can be argued, that the preservation of the political condition is regarded by most theorists as morally good, not necessarily because the condition itself is regarded a good, but because it is believed to be instrumental to values conceived to be good, such as justice, equality, wealth or rights.

Fighting political decay involves focusing on ideas and practices that threaten to deteriorate the political condition. There are many possible causes of political decay in contemporary Western societies stemming from things such as political violence, authoritarianism or the introduction of 'post-truth politics' causing political debates less grounded in evidence.⁴ It is not possible to deal with all aspects that are pertinent to understanding the many causes of political decay even if reduced to the Western world. Instead, I have selected one particular aspect that I believe is under-theorised yet a possible threat to the political condition. This is symbolised by the other central term of the paper, 'political arcadianism'. Arcadianism refers to a backward-looking nostalgic temperament which in political life may result in a reactionary political course. Zygmunt Bauman has recently written about this tendency in contemporary societies. He argues that people have lost faith in utopian thinking turning instead to ideas of the past, hence substituting Utopia with 'Retrotopia'.⁵ Following Bauman, there are possibly similarities

³ Morris L. Cohen, *Law: The Art of Justice* (New York: Hugh Lauter Levin, 1992) p. 40.

⁴On the issue of 'post truth' see Matthew d'Ancona, *Post Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury Press, 2017).

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (London: Polity Press, 2017).

between utopianism and arcadianism which should be further explored. Furthermore, the relation between political decay and political arcadianism is not self-evident. In what follows, three questions are central:

1. Is the classical notion of political decay a fruitful assumption when analysing political change?
2. What if any are the parallels between political arcadianism and political utopianism?
3. What if any is the relationship between political arcadianism and political decay?

There are three central arguments of the paper: First, while the distinction between good and evil government is not particularly serviceable, the concept of political decay is not a redundant concept and it is fruitful to assume that the political condition itself involves the seeds to its own destruction and decay. Second, the crisis of political modernity, public distrust in government, and nostalgic longing to an idealised past may result in the perceived past becoming an ideal for the future. Arcadianism, just like utopianism, involves an element of political perfectionism that is not particularly fruitful. However, contrary to utopianism, arcadianism may help restore the lost lifeworld in times of turmoil. Third, while arcadianism is not necessarily problematic it is futile since it is not possible to turn back. Moreover, arcadianism may trigger political decay when turning the attention of the public away from the present to the perceived past downplaying contemporary political challenges and possible solutions. In what follows, political decay is dealt with in the first section while the second section is concerned with political arcadianism.

Political Decay

The scary vision of the horrid and mutilated remains of what once was a vibrant body politic has inspired political theorists to integrate the dystopic image of political decay into their work. The most well-known example of this is probably the image of the slippery slope found in Plato's *Republic* showing the degeneration of forms of government from Timocracy to Oligarchy to Democracy and finally to Tyranny. For Plato political decay involves both communities and individual persons. The degradation is moral and political, and it involves both the communities and the persons living in them.⁶ Plato's text opens the door to several interpretations and critical remarks. To some of this I will return briefly, but for the moment it suffices to say that Plato at least underlined that we should not entertain too high a belief in government because states and peoples, like persons, are bound to die. However, the dystopic image also conveys a more optimistic message: that wherever we find ourselves along the slippery slope there is always the opportunity to prevent decay, at least for the time being. Theorising political decay, then, is a way to understand and value the precious and vulnerable nature of the political relationship. Moreover, on the personal level, political decay at least for Plato is the serious consequence

⁶ Plato, *Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), book eight and nine.

of lack of self-control, giving way to temptations such as honour, wealth, excessive freedom or power.

Thomas Hobbes's account of the state of nature as a *bellum omnium contra omnes* stands out among early modern political theorists conveying another dystopic message, a warning against resisting public order. In comparison to most authors of his times, Hobbes largely rejected the idea that natural law provides a framework for politics within and among nations. Hobbes' theory of the civil condition – the life within the commonwealth – is profoundly different from a situation where the social contract is absent or has failed, because, in his view, the state of nature is brutal and uncivil.⁷ Hobbes clearly viewed political decay as a moral vice and as something that might follow when one acts against one's interest as a citizen, at least when many people fail in this respect. With Hobbes, individual persons are in the foreground, portrayed as lonely and frightened, having to take destiny in their own hands. Michael Oakeshott once reflected on this aspect of Hobbes's *Leviathan* as the opposite to the myth in Genesis about the Fall of Man portraying mankind as proud and powerful when resisting God, whereas Hobbes 'recalls man to his littleness, his imperfection, his mortality, while at the same time recognizing his importance to himself'.⁸ Hobbes viewed the political condition in terms of an established relationship founded on the equality of its members. There is in Hobbes's theory a trade-off between freedom and order. Ideally, each citizen should '*be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other man against himself*'.⁹ This is the basis for mutual recognition between all citizens of the state, upon which principles of equality and freedom under the laws could be settled. Thus, with Hobbes persons are capable of doing good as well as evil and are capable of rational as well as irrational actions with respect to their conduct as citizens. However, Hobbes also shows that, from time to time, we pursue a conduct driven by pride or lust for power, against our best interest as individual persons, and to the collective body of the state.

While these key texts make central the connection between the moral life and political community, emphasising the moral life of men living together in the pursuit of good government, we learn from the dystopic narratives that political decay unavoidably involves moral decay of both states and citizens. This is so because neither Plato nor Hobbes claimed to have found a cure for political decay, but only ways to limit decay temporarily. Furthermore, even the best practicable state in their view harbours a destructive element. This is made explicit in the final words of *The Statesman*, where Plato admits that even the best conceivable state would be based on the most striking inequality among human beings, that of slaves and free men.¹⁰ Stanley Rosen views this passage in the text as an indication by Plato that politics even in the best of forms cannot reach

⁷ See Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 456 and Annabel Brett, *Changes of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011) p. 5.

⁸ Michael Oakeshott, 'Leviathan a Myth' in *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000) p. 163.

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 100 [p. 65] italics in original.

¹⁰ This is made explicit in the final words of the *Statesman* when Plato describes the art of the Statesman as analogous to the art of weaving, uniting both free men and slaves in concord [311b7-c6].

perfection, and that perfection in politics therefore is 'trans-political' and remains with philosophy.¹¹ Rosen makes a similar observation in his study of Plato's *Republic* claiming that,

...the Socratic city does not resolve the problem of unity and difference; rather, it institutionalizes that problem. Socrates's fundamental premise, that the city should be as much like one man as possible, is itself entirely impossible. The tripartite division of powers attributed to the individual soul reveals the discontinuities and factions that are present in each of us by virtue of our very humanity. This becomes obvious when the parts of the soul are restated in political terms.¹²

Rosen's reading of Plato points to the elements of the texts revealing Plato's awareness of the imperfection inherent in every past, present, or future state, and hence, the permanent threat of political decay. For Hobbes the political condition is always vulnerable and depends on the Sovereign's ability to uphold law and order, and of the citizens to support and obey. The main point in Hobbes's *Leviathan* is the sharp distinction between the brutal state of nature and the state under sovereign rule. The quality of government under a sovereignty may differ. Hence, political decay may take place when the covenant is broken by the contracting parties or when violated by the Sovereign. As is claimed by Gabriella Slomp, 'the political man contains natural man' and always 'carries the state of nature inside his soul'.¹³ This is reason enough not to expect the state to be stable and secure. Thus, among two of the most formative political thinkers, the political condition, even when theorised under ideal circumstances, contains the seeds to its own destruction.

Francis Fukuyama has recently dealt with political decay in a slightly different way, taking into account historical change into account. He argues that change for the better sometimes flows from political decay. Political decay is then not regarded a slippery slope from good government to anarchy but as an element of transition from one political order to another:

Political decay is...in many ways a condition of political development: the old has to break down in order to make way for the new. But the transitions can be extremely chaotic and violent; there is no guarantee that political institutions will continuously, peacefully, and adequately adapt to new conditions.¹⁴

Hence, judging from Fukuyama, political decay is not necessarily dystopic. Clearly, when looking back on the events of political history it is possible to discern how political unrest, war and revolutions have indeed brought about change for the better. However, one has to admit that this is not particularly comforting when confronted with the amount of violence and human suffering that is associated with such processes as they go on. The

¹¹ Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995) p. 190.

¹² Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005) p. 308.

¹³ Gabriella Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) p. 7.

¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014) p. 462.

principle of violent revolutionary change – ‘do evil, that good may come’ – is not satisfying but neither is the acceptance of bad government rather than no government.¹⁵ Fukuyama shows that good government is perhaps not grounded on the same unchanging principles but involves a conception of change that may sometimes be painful.

On a closer look, the distinction between good and evil government addressed in the beginning of this essay is difficult to maintain and perhaps not particularly fruitful either. It is probably better to conceive of the matter more in line with the terminology of G.H. Moore who introduced the terms ‘mixed good’ and ‘mixed evil’. Viewing the political condition as a ‘mixed good’ means conceiving of it as an intrinsic good that also contains some essential elements that are evil. Alternatively, government is viewed as a ‘mixed evil’, i.e., as an intrinsic evil that contains as an essential element also something that is good.¹⁶ The great tradition of political thought has for the most part preferred to view the political condition as a ‘mixed good’. Although some authors have been more pessimistic than others; Carl Schmitt and his followers standing out as notable exceptions, not accepting the distinction made by Hobbes, that the political condition is not the state of nature.¹⁷ Schmitt definitely addressed the problem of political decay to an extent that most contemporary political theorists have not done, but his theory of political decay proceeds from a particular notion of the political condition that most political theorists would not accept. What is clear, however, is that all concepts of political decay originate in a conception of government. Hence, a starting point for dealing with political decay is to consider the vulnerability of the political condition, which is where political decay begins.

The vulnerability of the political condition has been central to several contemporary political theorists reflecting on political decay during the twentieth century. A key author in this respect is Hannah Arendt, who emphasizes the fragile character of the political relationship, and who holds that political associations are close to perfection only in rare moments. Her somewhat romantic of account of the ‘treasure’ inherent in the revolutionary situation– the ‘public happiness’– should not be viewed as indifferent to political decay, but rather the opposite as it acknowledges that ‘the treasure was never a reality but a mirage’.¹⁸ Arendt’s work on totalitarianism and the Shoah make her a key thinker of political decay in the modern world: she has identified the many destructive elements of contemporary society and the challenges posed to social science.¹⁹ Political decay would result in the totalitarian state, which Arendt claimed would involve philosophical reflections in a situation ‘in which not even common sense makes sense any

¹⁵ Romans 3:8.

¹⁶ G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 207-208.

¹⁷ Hobbes claimed that sovereignty enables citizens to live a ‘retired life’ when liberated from the struggle of the pre-political condition. Hobbes, *De Cive* (Indianapolis, IN and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993), p. 227. See also Deborah Baumgold, *Hobbes’s Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 134. The matter was essential to Leo Strauss in his notes to Schmitt’s *The Concept of the Political*. See Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 98-99.

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961) p. 5.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (London: André Deutsch, 1986); ‘Social Science Techniques and the Study of the Concentration Camps’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 12:1 (1950), pp. 49-64.

longer'.²⁰ Thus, for Arendt political decay, which leads to totalitarianism, marks the beginning of something new and at the same time a going back to the fundamental questions of human life and activity.²¹ Leo Strauss, who shared much of Arendt's experiences as well her intellectual heritage, identified political decay not only with the totalitarian state and its consequences but also with the parallel decline of natural right in political thought and practice.²² The notion of natural right according to him sets 'an absolute limit to human arbitrariness'.²³ The reinvigoration of political theory called for by Strauss was partly a reaction to an omission among the social sciences in an age of positivism and historicism, and a call to acknowledge the importance of values and judgement. Therefore, he argues, 'modern utopianism naturally forgets the existence of 'forces of evil' and the fact that these forces cannot be fought successfully by enlightenment'.²⁴ Political philosophy for Strauss represented a yardstick for improving political life, which is unavoidably in conflict with the political world.²⁵ Thus, both Strauss and Arendt analysed political decay in the modern world in light of the ancient conflict between the philosopher and the state writ large.

Judging from these few examples, the problem of political decay is far from straightforward, but nevertheless points to what seems to be a perennial problem for the political condition, and a problem to be experienced anew by every generation. We learn that the vulnerability of the political condition probably is unavoidable and a necessary element of the political condition itself. Having accepted that, the main worry should be to identify and confront whatever it is that threatens the political condition in the time and the place we live.

Political Arcadianism

A well-known enemy of the political condition is the temptation to avoid dealing with the world we live in while engaging instead in utopian dreams about brighter worlds. The utopian temperament involves a belief in political perfection, which conservative political thinkers have sought to resist by adopting a sceptical posture towards what they have identified as Jacobinism, or a Baconian spirit of political engineering.²⁶ Utopianism is associated with the progressive ideologies of the modern age and is an expression of modernity in politics and society. While utopianism may still hold sway in the Western world, we are sometimes urged to rethink the modern political ideals and to reject the

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', *Social Research*, 57: 1 (1990[1954]), p. 102.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99-103.

²² Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953).

²³ Leo Strauss, 'What Can We Learn from Political Theory?', *The Review of Politics*, 69: 4 (2007 [1942]), p. 521.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

²⁵ See Michael P. Zuckert & Catherine H. Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014) and Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), Ch. 6.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Company); Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996).

political project of modernity. Such is the case with nostalgic nationalism and protectionism, aiming to make this or that nation great again when referring to a more prosperous past. In these trends looms a temptation that is harder to resist, especially for conservatives. This is the inclination not to look forward into future brighter worlds, but instead to turn around and view as an ideal a shimmering past. This I have labelled political arcadianism.

The term arcadianism refers to an idyllic narrative about the rural life expressed in culture, life-style and literally fiction. The term is represented in the political literature, for example in the early modern period, as a reaction to naturalism, and later in the ecological movement and in the context of Post-colonialism in reaction to liberalism.²⁷ Arcadian ideals in contemporary political life can supposedly be very different, ranging from material things such as restoring a branch of industry that has lost its place in global competition to non-material values, such as enforcing traditional religious and social norms, or the preservation of traditional gender roles. While not central to the political literature, or dealt with systematically, there seems to be a genealogy of the concept perhaps worthy of further exploration. However, space does not permit this theme to be further elaborated here.

More precisely, political arcadianism is understood here as the attempt, by political means, to restore an imagined past, or to model political reform on the basis of a perceived past. It is important to distinguish between political arcadianism in this precise sense and an arcadian temperament which may be quite harmless, for example when looking back on a happy and innocent childhood, or on a time past that for some reason embodies what one feels to be the perfect condition of life. Such a longing is associated with a sense of nostalgia or sentimentality that is often non-political. But even when it is expressed in political life arcadianism can be harmless. However, arcadianism may sometimes take the form of a reaction, attempting by political means to return to a condition of a glorified past thereby presenting a seemingly easy way out of contemporary political challenges. The important thing is that the past, however conceived of, functions as a model for reshaping, by means of political power, what has been lost. When looking backwards for guidance, there is the tendency to refrain from recalling the elements of the past condition that was not good. Political arcadianism is thus likely to invent its own history when idealising the past and is likely to ignore informed historical criticism or uncomfortable facts about the state of affairs in the past.

It is difficult to discern what consequences political arcadianism may have for political life. For example, it is hard to see how nostalgic and pastoral ideals could foster a modern totalitarian state. Yet, this was the case with the fascist political ideology that eventually led to totalitarianism in the 1930s, such as in Nazi Germany. It is possible that arcadianism belongs to the modern world as a critical perspective to it and that it may even borrow elements of modernity. Political arcadianism in the modern context may take the nation state as its appropriate domain and its advocates would make use of modern

²⁷ J.H. Burns & Mark Goldie, *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 342; Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* 3rd Edition (London & New York: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 31; Pavan Kumar Malreddy *et al* (Eds.), *Reworking Postcolonialism: Globalization, Labour and Rights* (Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 24.

communication technologies and media. Political arcadianism can possibly support anti-modern (or even post-modern) political projects, supporting a future-oriented political order but referring to ideals of the past. While political modernity has always involved utopianism, postmodernism, just like anti-modernism, may have contributed to the kind of particularistic and relativist thinking by providing intellectual support to various reactions towards political modernity. These reactions may invite political arcadianism.

While the term arcadianism has not been much elaborated in the political literature, at least not in any systematic sense, it is important to the wartime poetry of W.H. Auden and is implicit in much of T.S. Eliot's work during the same period. To Auden, arcadianism symbolises a particular arcadian temperament, looking back on an innocent past. The theological aspect of this, which is central to the works of both Auden and Eliot, is the human inclination to look back on the perfect condition of humanity before the fall, expressing a futile desire to re-enter the Garden of Eden. Alan Jacobs explains the position accordingly quoting Auden:

Humanity must turn its back on that original Garden and look for the experience of wholeness elsewhere; 'but you will not find it /Until you have looked for it everywhere and found nowhere that is not a desert.' Arcadianism is, in brief, the refusal of this hard and purgative path, and the corresponding longing for the angels and their swords simply to go away. Hoping to return to the Garden is like hoping to return to the womb.²⁸

Thus, arcadianism has to do with longing for wholeness, presenting a seemingly simple way to overcome problems and imperfection. Arcadianism also involves a contrasting image, just like Lorenzetti's frescoes described in the introduction. In the case of Auden and Eliot, such a contrasting image is the 'the purgatory path' of human existence in a dry landscape, 'for the time being' wandering between the Arcade and the second coming of Christ. The point they make is that there is no turning back. There is simply no choice but to resign the futile hope to restore what forever is lost and what humans cannot re-create.

In another context arcadianism represents not only a nostalgic longing but also a search for identity in an alienating world. Critical Theory pictures the dilemma between political modernity and the arcadian temperament. Critical theorists have generally been pessimistic about human rationality and have sought to combine an urge to develop political and cultural modernity while cultivating an awareness of the dangers attached to modernity.²⁹ Critical Theory rejects nostalgia and the attempts to copy models of the past to contemporary politics and culture. A central element in this literature is the contradictions of modern society between the impersonal forces of economic and political systems, and the lifeworld where people relate to themselves and to others.³⁰ One particular work that stands out in this respect is Walter Benjamin's complex and unfinished

²⁸ W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratory*, edited by Alan Jacobs (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. xxii.

²⁹ See for example Theodor W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Verso, 1999).

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

sketches published as *The Arcades Project*.³¹ Perhaps the notion of arcadianism is one lens through which to read this strange collection of papers with its contrasting images of the modern city, described by Benjamin in terms of the Paris arcades, made of iron and glass, and the alienated people picking up pieces of the past when struggling to re-create a lost lifeworld. They are what Benjamin characterises 'collectors'. The collector 'takes up the struggle against dispersion' against the scattered images and representations of the world.³² For Benjamin this is also an image of the intellectual, of the historian. In his view, history unfolds as we experience it. The history of the nineteenth century he pictures as dreams about the past:

The new, dialectical method of doing history presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth. To pass through and carry out what has been in remembering the dream! – Therefore: remembering and awakening are most intimately related. Awakening is namely the dialectical, Copernican turn of remembrance. // The nineteenth century, a spacetime < Zeitraum > (a dreamtime < Zeit-traum >) in which the individual consciousness more and more secures itself in reflecting, while the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep. [...] We must follow in its wake so as to expound the nineteenth century – in fashion and advertising, in buildings and politics – as the outcome of its dream visions.³³

There is a curious connection between these formulations by Benjamin and the political writings of Arendt. For Arendt, political theory is conceived as 'being-in-the world', wandering and reflecting on the human condition of the twentieth century. To Arendt, the absence of tradition in the modern world makes possible a renewal of the political condition in a 'non-time-space'.³⁴ Prejudice, she argues, emerges out of the past while in the modern world, we can make decisions under conditions where familiar standards no longer make sense. The political condition, ultimately 'an in-between space' where people interact, is in her view not dependent on exogenous standards:

The loss of standards, which does indeed define the modern world in its facticity and cannot be reversed by any sort of return to the good old days or by some arbitrary promulgation of new standards and values, is therefore a catastrophe in the moral world only if one assumes that people are actually incapable of judging things per se, that their faculty of judgement is inadequate for making original judgements, and that the most we can demand of it is the correct application of familiar rules derived from already established standards.³⁵

³¹ The English title of Benjamin's work is *The Arcades Project* while the German original title is *Das Passagen-Werk*, in both cases referring to a Paris context. The term arcadianism is to my knowledge not used by Benjamin and the choice of English title is probably a coincidence.

³² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge Mass. & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 211.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

³⁴ Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 13.

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction Into Politics', *The Promise of Politics*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), p. 104.

The promise of politics in Arendt's view, is the promise of freedom only to appear in 'the unique intermediary space of politics'.³⁶ To achieve this is not to escape history but to realise that history does not necessarily determine our judgements and actions in political matters. In other words, the attempt to collect and to construct something upon which to rejoice may well involve arcadian ideals, but is not necessarily related to political action, and hence not to political arcadianism. Perhaps it is fruitful to conceive of the arcadian temperament as a natural inclination among humans to look backwards in search of a perspective, an orientation or a means to acquire meaning, such as we do when relating to a tradition of thought. When experienced in social and cultural life, the arcadian temperament has to do with identity, belonging and a lifeworld, that helps people to cope in a changing world, to search for an understanding and a perspective, or to withstand suffering and to uphold human dignity and respect in hard times.

Political arcadianism, by contrast, I take to be a nostalgic reactionary political programme sustained by power, even democratic power, seeking to restore a perceived paradise lost. In that sense political arcadianism is actually forward-aiming but backward-looking, and in a sense a cousin of utopianism. Political arcadianism is perhaps more about an imagined and wished for future than an adequate account of the past. It looks to the imagined past for guidance rather than relying on grand schemes or abstract principles. For this reason political arcadianism is easier to relate to than utopianism since it does not consist of abstract theories or an esoteric discourse. Political arcadianism relies on well-known and accessible narratives creating a political myth. The most serious consequence of political arcadianism is that it risks turning the attention of the public away from the political problems of the day, obscuring the responsibility of all members of a political community to uphold and maintain the political condition. That is why political arcadianism may cause political decay.

It is possible that both utopianism and arcadianism always have a place in political reflection and action by representing different temperaments, one that is forward-looking and one that is backward-looking. If that is so, the important point to underline is that neither temperament should lead us to neglect dealing with the present for the longing for a golden future or the good old days. The past is always a part of the present and informs our actions as much as utopian dreams of the future may do. Eliot famously writes in *Burnt Norton*:

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.³⁷

Rejecting political arcadianism is not the same as rejecting the past. The words of Eliot in this context convey the insight that the past as well as the future is important, and perhaps impossible to neglect, but that it all points to the present.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, 1971 [1943]), p. 14.

Conclusions

To conclude, the main arguments of this paper are the following: First, that the political condition involves the seeds to its own destruction through political decay, and that this is not any different today from what many previous generations have experienced. Second, that political arcadianism risks fostering futile attempts to return to what can never more be (and what perhaps never was). By turning the attention of the public away from the present to the past, political arcadianism may threaten the political condition and cause political decay. However, resisting political arcadianism is not a sufficient means to avoid political decay. Viewing the political condition as a solution to the human predicament may not suffice. Perhaps, that is why Hobbes regarded the State of Nature as immanent in all of human life, and the ability to contain the evil of human relations through political institutions an option only for the time being, but never ever to restore among humans on Earth the peace and tranquillity enjoyed in the Arcade.

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Moral Imaginative Resistance to Heaven: Why the Problem of Evil is so Intractable

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The majority of philosophers of religion, at least since Plantinga's reply to Mackie's logical problem of evil, agree that it is logically possible for an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God to exist who permits some of the evils we see in the actual world. This is conceivable essentially because of the possible world known as heaven. That is, heaven is an imaginable world in a similar way that logically possible scenarios in any fiction are imaginable. However, like some of the imaginable stories in fiction where we are asked to envision an immoral act as a moral one, we resist. I will employ the works of Tamar Gendler on imaginative resistance and Keith Buhler's Virtue Ethics approach to moral imaginative resistance and apply them to the conception of heaven and the problem of evil. While we can imagine God as an omnibenevolent parent permitting evil to allow for morally significant freedom and the rewards in heaven or punishments in hell (both possible worlds), we should not. This paper is not intended to be a refutation of particular theodicies; rather it provides a very general groundwork connecting issues of horrendous suffering and imaginative resistance to heaven as a possible world.

'Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature ... and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.' 'No, I wouldn't consent,' said Alyosha softly.'

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*¹

'Rebellion'

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Fyodor Dostoevsky creates a possible world, a literary fiction that stokes our imaginations about the notion of a realm that promises 'peace and rest at

¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: Barnes and Noble. 1995), p. 226.

last', or heaven. In the story, Ivan presents this imaginative scenario to his younger brother, and soon-to-be-monk, Aloysha. Ivan accepts the logical possibility of a world in which something like heaven could exist, but the point of his hypothetical question is to illustrate his resistance to such a world. The 'unavenged tears' is a reference to the suffering in this world of an innocent child that he thinks remains unjustified regardless of promises of heaven no matter how perfect we imagine it to be. In this way, Ivan is also rebelling against the very actual world into which he has been thrown.

Even Aloysha, who follows Ivan's visualizations, refuses to go along with imagining that he could have made the world the way that it actually is with the promise of heaven, the ideal state of harmony with God, the very reason we were all created to begin with,² but that requires horrible suffering of innocent children. Aloysha can imagine this possibility, but he would rather not. This can be explained as an instance of moral imaginative resistance against the possible world that includes heaven.

When Ivan details the gruesome treatment of an 8 year old boy (just under the age of moral culpability according to Orthodox teaching) at the hands of a ruthless landowning general, he despairs of finding any meaning in this world, and anticipating a theist's response that heaven is the answer, he despairs of that too: 'Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have the children to do with it? ... And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all of their fathers' crimes, such a truth is *not of this world* and is beyond my comprehension ... I most respectfully return Him the ticket.'³ Here, the mysteries of God's ways lead Ivan to return his ticket to salvation rather than attempt a rationalization that God allows evil for a greater good. To be clear, it is not merely the conception of heaven *by itself* that Ivan resists imagining; it is the entire state of affairs presumably necessary for anyone to get to heaven. This conception of heaven is consistent with William Lane Craig's, for example:

Heaven may not be a possible world when you take it in isolation by itself. It may be that the only way in which God could actualize a heaven of free creatures all worshipping Him and not falling into sin would be by having, so to speak, this run-up to it, this advance life during which there is a veil of decision-making in which some people choose for God and some people against God. Otherwise you don't know that heaven is an actualizable world. You have no way of knowing that possibility.⁴

So, it is heaven as a final state, the teleological end, along with the necessary conditions in the 'run-up to it' that Ivan resists imagining. But what exactly is involved with imaginative resistance to possible worlds?

² Jerry Walls, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 64.

³ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, pp. 225-6 (my emphasis).

⁴ William Lane-Craig and Ray Bradley, 'Can a Loving God Send People to Hell? The Craig-Bradley Debate.' (Online at <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/can-a-loving-god-send-people-to-hell-the-craig-bradley-debate/> 1994), (accessed 2018-10-3).

Imagination and possible worlds

There are two senses of 'possible' in philosophy: logical and causal. To clarify this, consider two conceptions of 'impossible'. If something is causally impossible, that means that things or state of affairs cannot actually happen in this real world in which we currently reside. It is *causally* impossible that track star Hussein Bolt can run 85mph. However, it is not *logically* impossible for him to run that fast. All we need to do is invoke our imaginations in the way any science fiction writer might: create a picture in the 'laboratory of our minds', to borrow from a common phrase used to describe thought experiments. Nothing in this scenario is absurd, contradictory, unimaginable, inconceivable, or *logically* impossible, even though it is not causally possible for this to happen given the laws of physics and biology in this actual world. On the other hand, try to imagine creating a fiction or possible world in which the central character claims to have gotten a full-body tattoo of herself, only a foot taller. Or try to think of a round triangle, or something existing and *not* existing at the same time, or a married bachelor. These notions are absurd, inconceivable, conceptually contradictory, and causally *and* logically impossible. In other words, there is no possible world in which they could exist as they violate laws of logic and philosophers assume that the laws of logic apply to *all* possible worlds. Theologians and philosophers have constructed a possible world that they claim *can* be our reality in the future, but it is not possible now with our current fallen and unregenerate state. So, heaven is not an actual world for me right now, but it is a logically possible world for me in the future that I can imagine – if I wish to. But I don't.

Heaven as a fictional but possible world

Heaven is a possible world because it does not violate any laws of logic. To be a possible world, it must be imaginable. This is a problem if we appeal to some of the scriptures, such as this: 'Eye has not seen, ear has not heard' the contents of heaven, and that heaven far exceeds all that has ever 'entered into the heart of man' as 'we see indistinctly as in a mirror' while on Earth.⁵ More recently, C.S. Lewis follows St. Paul in this: 'The thing itself has never actually been embodied in any thought, or image, or emotion'.⁶ It is better than anything you have ever known, so much so you could not possibly have any idea what it will be like. If we interpret these passages and others like them in a literal sense that knowledge of heaven is wholly inscrutable, this will lead to what I call *ad hoc mysterianism*.⁷

⁵ I Corinthians 2:9, 13:12.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Harper-Collins e-books, 2009), pp. 152-3.

⁷ 'Mysteriansim' typically applies to complex religious notions in a positive sense. For example, a central conception like the Trinity is to be revered but not fully unraveled as if it were a problem. I use the term in a negative sense, coupled with *ad hoc*, to imply an all-too convenient tactic to sustain the internal coherence of an idea in the face of otherwise compelling counter-evidence against that idea. For instance, when we pray for a sick loved one who soon after is healed, we claim to *know* it was God and He is good. When we pray and the loved one passes, it is a mystery, it is part of God's plan, it will be revealed to us in the end, as we are far too cognitively limited to comprehend. *Ad hoc*

Happily, not all theists suggest heaven is wholly ineffable, and a good many have written quite a lot on the subject, so we are able to imagine at least some attributes of this realm and even something about the potential inhabitants. We can borrow from St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, and attempt to grasp the possible world of heaven by analogy, limited though that method might be. We are told that we will be perfected beings able to 'see' the face of God in heaven. Our potential to 'see' God could be analogous to the manner in which we 'see' the solution to a puzzle or 'get' the point of a story.

In the broadest terms, the traditional account of heaven ties together the concepts of salvation and perfect happiness: 'Heaven is the perfect place for people made perfect. Perfection is the goal of God's sanctifying work in us. . . . *He is making us fit* to dwell in His presence forever. The utter perfection of heaven is the consummation of our salvation'.⁸ We have all used words like 'perfection', but just as we might have all employed the term 'literally', this does not mean we know precisely what we are saying. Yet, even with a terribly vague notion of 'perfection', it is still likely that no one on Earth is presently 'fit' to be in heaven, so heaven is really no more than a possible world or a fiction that we can imagine exists.

In one sense, it begs the question to describe heaven as a fiction, as that too quickly connotes something unreal. Perhaps heaven is and always has been an actual world, and our currently fragmented, finite, and flawed state of mind precludes us from realizing that heavenly mode of existence. Maybe, but the burden of proof to deny such a claim does not rest with me anymore than I should have the burden to prove that I am not currently in the Matrix.

In another sense, it is appropriate to make the analogy between fictional worlds and heaven in much the same way we can look at depictions of the future as a fictional but possible world. Consider the science fiction of someone like Isaac Asimov or Arthur C. Clarke. At the time of their writings, the content of their work was clearly fictional in the sense that it was not actual or even causally possible. But it was logically possible, and in many cases, the scenarios they encouraged readers to imagine are now actual and this fact is likely due to some degree of causal relation between their creative musings and scientists who were able to turn the scientific *thought* experiments into scientific *empirical* experiments. A similar case could be made by theists that heaven as a possible world can be made a real state of affairs for me *if* I believe and do what is required of me in this actual world. To borrow again from Lane-Craig: 'I'm saying that it may not be feasible for God to actualize heaven in isolation from such an antecedent world'.⁹ Further, describing heaven as a fictional world in this way has no more negative connotations than depicting fantasy novelists as creating fictions¹⁰ that spark our imaginations, encourage moral musings, and

mysterianism is where no conceivable counter evidence actually counts as counter evidence, because we always have at the ready the phrase 'for all we know....'.

⁸ Walls, *Heaven*, p. 40, quoting John MacArthur (my italics).

⁹ Craig-Bradley Debate.

¹⁰ These are imaginative worlds that inevitably import content from the actual world the authors inhabit. See Kendall Walton and Michael Tanner, 'Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality.' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Vol. 68 (1994), pp. 27- 66, at pp. 35, 37, and Tamar Gendler, 'Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance' *The Journal of Philosophy* 97:2 (Feb. 2000), pp. 55-81, at pp. 75-6.

possibly affect real change in the actual world. This is a view a theist might have toward heaven as a possible world that we hope for in the future. Given how awesome heaven has been traditionally portrayed, it sounds odd to resist imagining it, and yet this is precisely where Ivan and Aloysha, e.g., do so resist. But why? What exactly is moral imaginative resistance to fictional scenarios?

Moral imaginative resistance to fictional or possible worlds

Consider the following logically possible circumstances within a fictional story: #1: Giselda occasionally made use of her powers of invisibility to evade capture. #2: Giselda loved the Romantic period so much that she frequently traveled back to it in her time machine. #3: *'In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl'*.¹¹ One of these claims stands out. They are all fictional, but while we can say, yes those things are possible in that world, or it is true in that world that these things happen, even though they may not be causally possible in this world, we 'violently resist'¹² imagining the third possibility is true even in the fiction, not because we can't, but because we don't want to.

According to Tamar Gendler, it is not that 'Our grasp on moral terms is too tightly connected to their applicability to certain sorts of actions for us to understand what it would be for them to come apart'¹³ but that we are reluctant to so separate them: 'And my unwillingness to do so is a function of my not wanting to take a particular perspective on the world – this world – which I do not endorse'.¹⁴ Part of what is implied here is that fictional worlds, even the more outlandish sorts, still must have a strong connection to the actual world: 'There is science fiction; why not morality fiction? [because] ... we are less willing to allow that the works' fictional worlds deviate from the real world in moral respects than in nonmoral ones'.¹⁵

So, if we add a moral dimension to our response, we might say we wish not to imagine that what Giselda did was the right thing in any possible world because we feel it is morally dubious to imagine in this way.¹⁶ This might not follow if the author or narrator told us that this is the *immoral* viewpoint of an *evil* character in the story. But we are not asked to imagine that. Instead, we are asked to imagine that something we take to be

¹¹ Walton and Tanner, *Morals in Fiction*, p. 37.

¹² Gendler, *Puzzle of imaginative Resistance*, p. 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁵ Walton and Tanner, *Morals in Fiction*, pp. 35, 37.

¹⁶ Aristotle claimed that it is a mark of an educated person to be able to entertain an idea without believing it. I agree, but I do not think 'entertain' requires of the rational person who is genuinely interested in world-views alien to her own to *want* those beliefs to be true. I entertain, think about seriously, or consider the reasons Hitler and the Nazis offered for their treatment of non-Aryans. This meets the criteria for Aristotle's 'rational man'. I need not go that further step and imagine that the immorality of their acts of genocide were in fact moral. Doing so is more likely to carry along with it all the emotions and motivations typically coupled with such imaginings. Keith Buhler, expanding on Gendler's account (pp. 80-1), analyzes situations like this with the distinction between imagining and supposing. The latter satisfies Aristotle's condition for a rational person without requiring the adoption of any given worldview (Buhler personal communication).

immoral--female infanticide--*is* in fact moral in that possible world. This is what we resist when we engage in moral imaginative resistance in fiction, and we do so in a way not found with non-moral scenarios we know to be false.

We know that it is not true that a human can run 85 mph, but we do not resist imagining it--indeed such possibilities make it into movies all the time. On the contrary, we might know that it is not true that murdering an infant is the moral thing to do, but in this case, we *do* resist imagining that it is morally just in any possible world, even as a fiction. Imaginative resistance drops if we are informed, directly or indirectly, that the author intends for audiences to confront the moral ambiguities and complexities of the fictional characters, for example. But we resist imagining along with the author when it is clear they are coaxing us to make-believe that an immoral act is moral in their fictional construction.¹⁷

However, one might respond that imagining Giselda did the right thing is not only possible but also desirable for some people, and that we cannot make universal claims about what should and should not be imagined even (especially) in fictional worlds. In response, I presuppose a brand of moral realism. This is the view that there are moral truths in the world independent of any culture or individual or time period, and, not surprisingly, this is the position of most theists. I assume a version of the Divine Command theory that grounds moral reality in the known will of God: think of the Ten Commandments and Natural Law theories.¹⁸ We would be hard-pressed to find a Divine Command theorist who would *not* resist imagining that infanticide is a moral good in any possible world. To do so would be to imagine that which you know to be immoral as moral. For many people like Ivan this is the very reason they resist imagining a possible world like heaven can render this world meaningful and just. They are asked to imagine an upside-down morality that they resist no matter what its source, as David Hume informs us: 'And where a man is confident of the rectitude of that moral standard, by which he judges, he is justly jealous of it, and will not pervert the sentiments of his heart for a moment, in complaisance to any writer whatsoever'.¹⁹ This complicates things for those of us who take God as the 'author' or source of heaven, because, via Divine Command theory, He is also the source of our morality. He is viewed as our omni-benevolent parent who promises salvation, clearly delineating what is right and wrong, proclaiming to love us all as His children. Yet for most, He remains hidden or wholly absent from beginning to end even when we experience horrible evils, and His palpable absence during these times increases our suffering.

¹⁷ One thing that this might show is that we tend to take moral truths to be more stable across possible worlds than causal or physical facts. The laws of physics across possible worlds seem malleable in our imaginations in a way laws of morality, so to speak, do not.

¹⁸ Aquinas, 'Ethics and Natural Law', in *The Philosophy of Religion* 5th Edition, edited by Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 638-640, at p. 639.

¹⁹ David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by T.H. Green and T.H. Grose. (London, 1882) at p. 283.

Why resist imagining heaven: the problem(s) of evil

It is common to invoke the prospects of heaven as a response to the problem of evil or what appears to be unnecessary suffering of innocent humans. Here is a summary of one version of the problem of evil: If God is all good (omnibenevolent), all powerful (omnipotent), and all knowing (omniscient), it would be unlikely that evils or unnecessary suffering would exist. This is because any potential evil that might happen, God would *know* about it, be *able* to stop it, and would *want* to do so. But, there is a great deal of evil, from genocide to the Zika virus, from earthquakes to Ebola, to all of the moral evils humans perpetrate against innocent children recorded by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. On one side of the issue, heaven is an answer to the problem of evil; on the other, the problem of evil makes the prospects of heaven untenable. It is difficult to argue that horrible things don't happen to good people, and perhaps even more difficult to claim that it is ultimately good that such things happen.²⁰ On the traditional account God is aware, able, and willing to stop evil, but permits it for some greater good that *necessarily* could not have come about if such evil did not occur. This scenario is not only logically possible, it is elemental in many free will replies to the problem of evil from St. Augustine in the 4th Century CE to Alvin Plantinga today, and central to realizing the potential state in heaven.

Consider why heaven necessitates suffering given these options: 1. A lot (or just some) horrendous suffering of innocents is unnecessary as it serves no greater purpose, either in bringing about a greater good or precluding a greater evil from happening; 2. All suffering is necessary to bring about a greater good or preclude a greater evil from happening. Option 1 is abhorrent to just about everyone, so we are left with 2. But in order to avoid the first horn, which is not at all easy to dismiss, we have to imagine God is something like a utilitarian who is constrained by particular means to achieve a desired end. That end or goal has to be great enough to justify the means. Or as Jerry Walls frames it:

Our only real hope is that the past might be redeemed....the doctrine of heaven represents the only substantive hope that the past might be redeemed in such a way that we can be fully glad for our existence even if our existence is somehow implicated in the worst tragedies of human history.²¹

For Ivan, this putative redemption comes at too great a cost to imagine that it is actually just even if the designer of it all has no choice but to allow children to suffer – those for whom the need of *redemption* seems particularly peculiar.

One form of this argument claims that even God cannot intervene in this world to halt evil or force us to seek Him in heaven, for to do so would limit morally significant freedom, and the loss of this would be *worse* than if there was no suffering at all. The

²⁰ But there is no shortage of such arguments: see Walls *Heaven*, Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, Alvin Plantinga 'The Free Will Defense', in *The Philosophy of Religion 5th Edition*, edited by Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 338-356, and John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), for a small sample.

²¹ Walls, *Heaven*, p. 130.

connection to heaven is clear: if you have freely chosen good or evil, then you either earn the rewards of heaven or you don't. Free will and the *inevitable* poor choices by many is still essential on more nuanced accounts of heaven, such as John Hick's or Jerry Walls', and some readings of scriptures where heaven is the state of perfect or *beatific* connection with God that goes beyond mere punishment and reward. In order for this to be possible, we have to mature spiritually, and a necessary component to the growth required to make us 'fit' to be in a relationship with God is our freely choosing to seek Him – or not.

In the opening quotation, Ivan assumes that suffering is 'essential and inevitable', something implied with the traditional Christian conception of heaven and at times stated outright: '...the existence of creatures with free choice that are highly vulnerable to each other and their environment will *inevitably* result in various sorts of evil'.²² But, for those who transform themselves sufficiently to be capable of experiencing heaven, the suffering on Earth will finally be understood as necessary, but infinitesimally minute in comparison to the eternal joys of heaven. Why can't we all see this? How could there be moral imaginative resistance to this positive account of heaven?

There is a common saying, not conveying the same sense that Ivan uses it (quoted above), that Jesus is 'Not Of This World' (NOTW). This is meant to be helpful for us while still on Earth by encouraging a wider perspective: we are 'in' this world but not 'of' it.²³ Aloysha tries hard to sustain this outlook responding to Ivan that he has forgotten that the tears of the tiny creatures are not unavenged, rather 'on Him [Jesus] is built the edifice, and it is to Him they cry aloud: 'Thou art just, O lord, for Thy ways are revealed!''²⁴ To which of God's children are these ways revealed and how and why to them in particular? Answers to these will go a long way toward addressing what role the possible world of heaven might play in making sense of, and *justifying*, the tribulations of this world.

The parent analogy

God's constant intervention to prevent my potential suffering, or to stop me from harming someone else, or to force me to love Him, would be akin to a divine helicopter parent who stunts the growth of her child by denying that child the opportunity to fail, and then learn from that failure, or to suffer, and learn from that suffering, or to freely develop a character requisite for properly loving that parent. I do not dispute the general idea behind these assertions, except for the last one, which I will address later. Indeed, I often fear that I involve myself too much already in the lives of my small children, potentially curbing the cultivation of their character or souls, to borrow from John Hick.²⁵

The parent analogy in response to the problem of evil and anticipation of heaven is not new. Here is a contemporary account: 'Just as we expect a small child to be blind to the reasons an adult has for allowing her to suffer *justified* pain, so we should expect that

²² Robin Collins, 'The Anthropic Teleological Argument', in *The Philosophy of Religion 5th Edition*, edited by Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 187-196, at p. 192, my italics.

²³ John 17:14-15.

²⁴ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, p. 227.

²⁵ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 253-261.

we will be blind to the reasons God has for allowing our *justified* suffering'²⁶ When I allow the physician to stick a needle in my child because this is the right thing to do from my perspective, my son still cries in a way that implies I have let him down. Put in terms of the traditional problem of evil, I am aware of the suffering that is coming and I know how it could be stopped, I have the power to step in and stop that suffering, and, as a good parent, I would want to stop it. 'Why don't I stop it?', Milo might ask.

Of course, being fairly certain of the consequences, I recognize that a greater evil would result if I tackled the doctor and stopped the suffering in that moment; my child might develop measles, mumps and/or rubella, notwithstanding my apparent heroism. Also, I intend to raise my children so they eventually become emotionally and intellectually developed people, capable of interacting with and learning from others. Given the way the actual world is, such maturity cannot be nurtured in an environment hermetically sealed to stave off any and all discomfort or error.²⁷ Even if this type of overbearing parenting were possible, the negative consequences of arrested development would outweigh the positives of no suffering and few errors. In other words, my allowing the *temporary* and *minimal* suffering of my child is justified.

But do we have good reason to imagine that heaven can provide analogous justification for the *horrendous* suffering of even one of God's children? Do we accept St. Paul's insistence that our childlike ignorance now will give way to a grown-up knowledge in the future: 'For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.'²⁸ Much of this depends upon a few interrelated questions: 1. What does it mean to 'reason like a child' and if current adults are like children in this analogy, what are actual children supposed to be? 2. Can adults in this life ever actually reason properly so as to 'see' the justice in God's hiddenness and His allowing not just suffering, but torture of the worst sorts? 3. Does someone like Saul achieve maturity in thinking on his own or was it foisted upon him directly by his now-revealed Father through the conversion experience? 4. Related to 3, is God's intervention on behalf of people like Saul arbitrary and capricious?

By 'child' I follow Ivan's lead and presume an age below the level of moral reasoning and culpability, admitting that this can be a rather vague point. Anyone under the age of 5 surely does not have the sufficient capacity to truly know right from wrong and does not possess the obligatory freedom to choose between them. This is what I mean with respect to 'reasoning like a child', perhaps a bit different than St. Paul who seems to imply a kind of self-centeredness, immaturity, and naiveté. I will focus primarily on 1-2.

²⁶ Trent Dougherty, 'Skeptical Theism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Online at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/skeptical-theism/> (accessed 2015-05-15), at p. 19, quoting Stephen Wykstra.

²⁷ See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 292-309 and Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, pp. 86-110.

²⁸ I Corinthians 13:9-12.

Moral imaginative resistance to heaven

As appealing as the parent analogy sounds at first reading, it is another instance of *ad hoc mysterianism*, and when it is fully unpacked, it has the opposite effect as that intended by its authors: rather than explaining the suffering of this world, justifying it by the eventual fruits in heaven that we, like children, fail to comprehend now, it elicits moral imaginative resistance. This is because the mystery of the Lord's 'ways' which allow the suffering of children is not at all analogous to cases of parents justifiably allowing their own children to suffer *briefly* for a greater good or avoiding a worse evil; a necessary trade off at times in a world they did not create but have to live in.

Following Ivan, to see why God allows the world to be the way it actually is in order to make heaven a possibility for us requires thinking that is *not of this world*, and it does not help to be told to just wait until the end for whatever partial understanding we now have to be made full. Yes, we say things like this to our children, but we typically mean 'Wait until you are a bit older when you will be able to understand', because when we are actual children, we simply cannot reason in a way that would make sense of our earthly torments. The parent analogy tries to have it both ways: we are childlike and ignorant about God's ways, but still knowledgeable enough to warrant our suffering here and now, and punishments or rewards in the afterlife.

What are we supposed to imagine about *actual* children in this life in relation to God, and in what way does He soothe them during their suffering? A benevolent parent does all she can to inform her child why some suffering is necessary; she tries to mitigate that suffering as much as she can by *being there* for her child especially if she knows this child could not possibly comprehend the situation. She makes her best effort to reveal the difference between right and wrong, and acts as a model for moral behavior so that eventually the child can cultivate similar moral sensibilities. The expected *ad hoc* reply: 'For all we know, God does all of this for the suffering children, and they get an immediate ticket straight to heaven'. But if so many adults consistently fail to even feel the presence of the benevolent parent during unbearable travails, it is even harder to imagine that God is there for children.

It does no good to claim that moral sensibilities only apply to human parents, as the very point of employing the parent analogy in the first place presupposes that God would act like a beneficent *parent*, but His absence in the lives of so many of His children in times of need is inconsistent with a conception of good parenting in any possible world even if we somehow 'know' that the goods of heaven outweigh the perils of this life.

Related to point 2 above, grown-up humans are like children to God in the parent analogy, but our 'adulthood' in relation to God seems forever out of our reach *in this world*. Because of this, we should not deserve praise and rewards in heaven, and surely not eternal hell, if everything is to be decided in the here-and-now. We simply do not understand the ways of God for we continue to 'reason like a child', which is to say we don't really know right from wrong any more than a child would. This seems to follow so long as we imagine—without resistance—that God's allowing child suffering is just. Imagining in this way, we bracket our normal moral reasoning that would charge any other parent with neglect. We suspend this form of reasoning, as St. Paul suggests, because to rely upon it would be as effective as founding our epistemic certainty of Santa's existence, e.g., on the arguments employed by a child. We are instructed to 'put away' such thinking.

The parent analogy requires that adults are only ever like children in this world who cannot comprehend the ways of God, and that it is only after this life is over that we gain the requisite knowledge; unless one has a direct revelation of some sort from the divine parent who, on all rational accounts, appears to be playing favorites. But if we do understand right from wrong, and God's moral commands are clear enough, then, paradoxically, we should resist imagining that heaven justifies allowing child torture and the like.

It is not our feebleness of mind on this earthly plane of existence that precludes us from imagining a morality that is NOTW. It is the desire deep within us to not want to remove ourselves from this-world morality; morality that we do understand, according to theists, because it is derived from divine commands or our natural, innate moral conscience.²⁹ This resistance 'is a function of my not wanting to take a particular perspective on the world—this world—which I do not endorse'.³⁰ We rightly resist imagining, if and when we do, the utilitarian thinking that heaven is the ends brought about by the means of allowing the torture of children. Heaven remains an otherworldly possibility that requires us to imagine that something that we know to be immoral *is* moral.

Those who resist imagining that the injustice of divine neglect is actually just, given the possible world of heaven, do so for the same reasons they resist imagining that the extreme negligence of a human parent in the real world or in a fiction is in fact a moral good. The inkling of this is found with some theists:

Why do we think that we ought to encounter God? Simple: Our concept of God is the concept of a perfectly rational, perfectly wise being who loves us like a perfect parent.... We all know that...it is bad for a child to grow up without a father or a mother, or to believe—for *good* reasons or bad—that her father or mother doesn't love her.³¹

I agree. The very reason the parent analogy is so compelling for theists—it connects us directly and personally with God—is the same reason it elicits moral imaginative resistance when we are told God permits horrible evils on particular children from whom God remains hidden.

To make the analogy more apt, imagine a parent who only indirectly reveals herself to her own child, hiding from her from the very start, only ever offering hints of her existence and even going so far as to purposely distance herself from the child with the intention of cultivating within that child the desire and need for that hidden parent.³² Further, this parent has many children, but reveals her love openly and unmistakably only to a couple of them. To these, she occasionally directly intervenes in their lives to reassure them about the meaning of suffering in this life and the treasures in the afterlife³³ or even steps in to stop them from great harm or from making a horribly evil choice (Saul).

²⁹ Aquinas, *Ethics and Natural Law*, pp. 639-40.

³⁰ Gendler, *Puzzle of imaginative Resistance*, p. 74.

³¹ Michael Rea, 'Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence', in *The Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 6th Edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea, (Australia: Wadsworth, 2012), pp. 266-275, at p. 268.

³² This is a point Hick makes, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 281-89.

³³ See James, *Varieties*, pp. 410-12 on St. Theresa of Jesus.

She also makes it clear that the ends could not be achieved without reality being this way, and this apparently is sufficient justification for those individuals, but not enough for the other children to accept without having any direct illumination or epistemic justification of their own.³⁴ For the vast majority of her other children, she refrains from intervening in *any* perceptible way on their behalf, allowing some to harm other innocent children and others to suffer terrible pain and mental anguish with the presumption that she does not even exist.

This is bad enough, but it is not much better even in cases of suffering in which we might 'know' the outcome will be a greater good. It is hard to imagine what benefit could come from allowing a child to be tortured, but as a tentative stab, consider that the parent had good reason to believe, at least as good of a reason as any theist has for the likelihood of an afterlife and that the child in question will go to heaven, that were the child *not* to be horribly abused for years she would *not* have developed the strong moral character needed to help other torture victims.

But we want the torture victim to benefit too because presumably the child is not consciously sacrificing herself for the greater good, so we can also imagine that in her later life she ends up flourishing somehow as a result of the years-long torture. Even if everything above is true and she is in fact better off for it in the future, I resist imagining it. The problem of evil is incalculably worse. The torture of innocents throughout history, either by people or nature, is impossible to estimate.³⁵ If we resist imagining that the individual parent case is an instance of justice in the end, we should have even more reason to resist imagining that heaven justifies suffering in this world.

While this account sounds like a caricature, it matches surprisingly well many of the descriptions of God as a parent who apparently has 'epistemic favorites.' Those are the children for whom He has adequately revealed Himself and the truth about heaven and earth, in some cases so manifestly that the recipients of these revelations are certain enough to die or kill for their beliefs. The rest of His children just have to take the favorite's word for it. In fact, St. Paul, formerly known as 'Saul' who persecuted Christians, clearly not at that time fit to be in a relationship with God in heaven, stands as an exemplar of the omnibenevolent parent's ostensible arbitrariness and capriciousness. The burden is on the theist to demonstrate at least *some* reason why Saul needed to have his mind and heart changed in a way other potentially destructive humans did not. History is rife with people who have performed hideous acts that harmed multitudes of innocent people. Maybe God did reveal Himself in a similar manner to all of those people as He did for Saul, and they

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 422-3, on the 'authoritative' of these experiences *only* for the experiencer.

³⁵ But for a scientific account of the sheer numbers of innocent children who have suffered in this world, see Gregory Paul, 'Theodicy's Problem: A Statistical Look at the Holocaust of the Children, and the Implications of Natural Evil for the Free Will and Best of all Possible Worlds Hypotheses', *Philosophy & Theology* 19:1-2 (2011), pp. 125-149. No matter what the consequences, allowing for torture even of those whom we know are *guilty* of acts of terrorism, e.g., and might have information to divulge, is still considered wrong, at least according to many theists who use their religious conscience to ground their moral conscience. Put another way, we do not want to imagine a world in which allowing torture and the like is just. A quick Google search provides a multitude of Christian sites that rail against torture. For just one, see: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/february/23.32.html> (accessed 2015-5-28). The title of the document is '5 Reasons Torture is Always Wrong.'

freely chose to ignore Him. But theists need to support that view, and appealing to *ad hoc mysterianism* will not help.

God may have His reasons for intervening in these ways for some, even providing the necessary push to make them 'fit' to be in a relationship with Him in heaven, but our very God-given moral sensibilities should compel us to resist imagining that this mode of 'parenting' is morally acceptable. This is revealed most powerfully given God's hiddenness from most people.

According to Michael Rea, 'God wants us to be seekers after him, and what better way to cultivate that disposition than to hide?'³⁶ Yes, as long as this game of hide-and-seek does not last for the entirety of one's earthly life, as it clearly seems to for most of the world's population who are not Christians, and frankly, it is the case for many avowed Christians as well. Walls admits as much but invokes the *ad hoc* intermediate, and theologically controversial, realm known as purgatory to deal with these otherwise immoral situations that neither allow for enough time on earth to mature, nor offer sufficient individual freedom to control the situations one is often thrown into: 'More specifically, it seems morally intolerable that chance should have a role at all in something of such extreme importance as one's eternal salvation'.³⁷ But that just is the problem with this brief and difficult life on earth.

There is not enough time, freedom, or evidence on earth to properly prepare us for a heavenly relationship with a God who seems to purposely hide from us in times of the greatest suffering. It does not help that many of His children are born into families who might have no inclination toward any religious conceptions of heaven or that one should seek salvation and peace and rest at last. Moral luck plays far too great a role in situating us in this world in relation to the possibility of the next. We know there is disagreement about heaven and God's revelations (or lack) among adults, including many brilliant, well-intentioned non-theists,³⁸ but keeping with the parent analogy, actual children have even less time, less capacity, and less freedom to believe and act appropriately to render God's absence in their lives as anything but extreme negligence.

In response, Rea considers the possibility that God remains hidden ('silent') for His own reasons. Just as we might improperly respond to the silence of another human, perhaps we are doing the same with God: 'sometimes our being pained by another person's behavior is *our* problem rather than theirs—due to our own dysfunctional attitudes and ways of relating to others, our own epistemic and moral vices, our own immaturity and the like'.³⁹ We are back to the need for character and soul-building to prepare us for heaven.

But Rea at once compares our relationship to God with that of other humans, and then tells us 'God is alien and 'wholly other' from us as it is possible for another person to

³⁶ Rea, *Divine Hiddenness*, p.

³⁷ Walls, *Heaven*, p. 68.

³⁸ Walls spends the majority of his work poking holes in other theists' interpretations of scripture and analogies regarding heaven. These are all well informed individuals about the scriptures and the history of commentaries on heaven, hell, and evil; they are adults who have put away childish things, many very smart fathers of the church. Why are so many brilliant thinkers so wrong on these supremely important matters?

³⁹ Rea, *Divine Hiddenness*, p. 273.

be'.⁴⁰ When one feels pained by the unmistakable absence of God during times of crisis, doubt, and atrocity, Rea muses that perhaps it is the one who doubts who is at fault. Maybe those whose children have been tortured and killed in holocausts or hurricanes, and who have yet to receive a single unambiguous message from their divine parent as to the justification of it all in heaven, are inappropriately refusing 'to accept God for who God is'.⁴¹ But we have just been informed that God is 'wholly other' and alien to us. Making us culpable for failing to believe in the promises of such a parent is blaming the victim on a biblical scale.

Beyond that, the story about the redemptive world of heaven ignores the suffering of children who truly do not have the capacity to understand when they may or may not be responding appropriately to their divine parent. Again, if adults are akin to children in relation to God, what are actual children in relation to God? Aloysha's words are telling: 'Thou art just, O lord, for Thy ways are revealed!'⁴² The arbitrary intervention and clear cases of intentional distancing from the lives of His children are supposed to be imagined as moral given the possibility of heaven. We are to suspend our clear moral reasoning that is *of this world*. But, as cases of moral imaginative resistance in fiction show, such moral views are in an important way more stable across '*all possible worlds*' than the laws of physics.⁴³ We rightly resist imagining that extraordinary parental neglect is morally acceptable. When God remains hidden from His children who cannot possibly understand why, we should rightly resist imagining that such non-intervention is morally just. Failure to do so seems to turn the famous phrase attributed to Dostoevsky on its head, from 'If there is no God, everything is permitted', to the *ad hoc* 'If there is a God, everything is permitted'.

Conclusion

I am not presenting a case for moral imaginative resistance against the justification of *gratuitous* evils, although that would follow from this argument.⁴⁴ This is a case for moral imaginative resistance against the possible world in which the *inevitability* of children suffering is portrayed as a just world. Since an all-good God cannot remove the suffering of children in this world without precluding free will and a beatific relation in heaven, it must be the case that the suffering is necessary, and thus, we are told to imagine, it has to be just. We can imagine that the 8-year-old boy in Dostoevsky's story upon whom such horrible evils were perpetrated, is in heaven with God, and even that he is happy in 'peace and rest at last'. But I am unconvinced that this provides a 'wider context that alters our view of it in such a way that we change the significance of that evil'.⁴⁵ What we are in fact

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 272.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴² Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, p. 227.

⁴³ Gendler, *Puzzle of imaginative Resistance*, p. 78.

⁴⁴ See Trent Dougherty, 'Reflections on the Deep Connection Between Problems of Evil and Problems of Divine Hiddenness', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8:4 (Winter 2016), pp. 65-84, at p. 74: 'God and unjustified evil are non-compassable, they never occupy the same logical space'.

⁴⁵ Walls, *Heaven*, p 123.

asked to do is minimize the *actual* suffering in contrast to the *hopes* for a greater good in the end. This is what St. Paul insists in Romans 8: 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us'. He might be able to speak for himself, or even some of the adult followers of Christ in this utilitarian fashion, but not to the children or their parents who have had no such revelation to offer the necessary hope. Even with such hope the idea of redemption in heaven for children horribly harmed on earth is difficult to imagine on moral grounds.

The parent analogy asks us to imagine that what we take to be immoral, a parent who permits awful harms to his children, who then blames them for failing to properly believe in him and trust him, *is* moral. The escape clause 'God works in mysterious ways' is an *ad hoc* dodge. To borrow the words of Clark Pinnock, but in a very different context: 'such things do not deserve to be called mysteries when that is just a euphemism for nonsense'.⁴⁶ Constructing in our imaginations the possible world known as heaven does not alleviate our concerns.

Any author can get us to imagine horrific child-abuse and neglect, but not that such things are morally acceptable even in a fictional or possible world. Of course theists do not think that suffering is good (some think it can be a virtue) or that genocide is good. But they do assume we will imagine along with them that God allowing it is just—and this I will not. It is to accept that the worst imaginable atrocities are in fact part of a just plan that we simply fail to see because we are like children. If we are truly incapable of distinguishing between examples of appalling neglect through purposeful absence and arbitrary intervention, and examples of loving care, then we have little capacity to make *any* moral claims. But this is absurd. To go along with imagining that the allowance of such suffering of children is ultimately just is truly thinking that is not of this world, and so I resist.

Through the employment of parent analogies, possible worlds, and potential future states of affairs, the theist is invoking imaginative scenarios to convince us that what we take to be unjust is in fact ultimately part of a just plan. We must rationalize away in a case of special pleading or fallacious appeal to ignorance what would otherwise be an inconsistent application of our moral imagination. Faith in the goodness of God overrides our justified trust in our moral sense when we are asked to imagine, and we do so without resistance, a possible world in which it is just that a divine parent allows her children to be tortured *for any reason*. To borrow again from Hume: 'I cannot, nor is it proper that I should, enter into such [vicious] sentiments'.^{47/48}

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⁴⁶ Clark Pinnock, 'The Openness of God—Systematic Theology,' in *The Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 6th Edition, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea, (Australia: Wadsworth, 2012), pp. 22-36, at p. 29.

⁴⁷ Hume, *Standard of Taste*, p. 247.

⁴⁸ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and especially my colleagues and friends Michelle Rotert and Brian Wagner for all of their insightful conversations about this issue and many others.

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