

Summary

The presence of evil appears to human consciousness – in prescientific thinking, in religious reflection, in literature. In European philosophical thought evil was usually treated as a surface phenomenon or as a positive form of being, where the later approach introduced the dualism of good and evil. Yet, in deeper reflection we recognize that evil is only the privation of good, i.e. the absence of proper good in the existence and action of a certain being. The understanding of evil is however conditioned by the understanding of being as well as of the structures of human cognition. We cognize beings as individual and in themselves determined wholes, which – from an existential point of view – are one in spite of the fact that they are innerly compound. We discover their nature as constituted of elements essentially necessary and relatively necessary i.e. parts integrating and perfecting. Against this backdrop we may then see evil as lacks – not of course in the elements constitutive for being, as this would destroy it, but as lacks in integrating parts (the lack of an eye, limb, tissue) or in perfecting parts (an intellectual error, moral evil, a lack of existential harmony). Thus, evil appears as the privation of good. It is the absence of good in something which would, by nature of what it is, be expected to have this good in itself or in its action. Evil as privation is not therefore a kind of being – it does not possess its own “nature” and cannot be cognized by itself. The cognition of any case of evil presupposes the understanding of the being in which that evil occurs.

Manifestations of evil are as multiple and various as various are beings and the lacks of elements proper to them. The ultimate cognition of those lacks may be achieved not only by the insight and analysis of the nature of being itself, but also by taking into account the relation of a given being to its exemplary idea in God. However, all forms and manifestations of evil amount to the subject in which the lacks of due elements in its existence and action occur. Both experiencing evil and evil's affecting anything are possible only through its subject. In the case of humans, if we want to understand human person as a subject of evil, we have also to understand human person multiaspectually. Yet, cognitive results which we obtain do not fully illuminate "the mystery of evil" because of its existential character as privation. If all human cognition amounts to the understanding of being then the lack of being makes any final explanation of that lack impossible.

Hermeneutico-philosophical speculations which we encounter in the contemporary philosophy of language and in attempts to understand myths and symbols do not solve the problem of how to explain evil. They usually end in a sort of Kantian "transcendental deduction" which is a questionable attempt to explain reality by invoking symbols describing evil, where those symbols are created by a subject itself.

Evil is "a scandal of being". This does not however mean that human beings should not overcome evil by doing good. And we cannot "accuse" God of evil occurring in the world, for in cognition of the relationship between God and creatures its basis is constituted by cognition of being and not of its lacks. In the Bible (1 Kor 15) we find the ultimate announcement: "God will be all in all". Thus, we achieve an understanding of evil in the process of rational cognition both natural and revealed. The problem of evil acquires a more complete solution in the perspective of biological death and in the context of faith in afterlife.