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Christian Thought and the Problem of Evil part II

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Résumé of the previous article

In naïve experience, evil is perceived as the unjustifiable reality, provoking indignation and entailing shame. How can it be understood? Pagan optimism, dualism, and pessimism slide around the difficulty, partially veiling experience and attempting to take the evil out of evil: the first, by minimizing evil as an optical illusion; the second, by transforming it into a pillar of a bipolar metaphysical order; the third, by submerging it into an absurd generalization. Christian thought has recognized that each of these attempts fails. Yet the most traditional of the Christian solutions has affinities with pagan optimism (that of Plotinus in particular). Leibniz and Teilhard de Chardin have erected versions so similar to this optimism that they are wide open to criticism. Thomism, on the other hand, offers a proven doctrine. Its analysis of evil as privation, as absence of an owed good, remains a valuable acquisition. Nevertheless, its attempts to rationally explain this privation run aground. They rest on a pagan idea of 'nothingness' (both real and effective) and on an equivocal notion of possibility. Making evil the ransom of the good aimed at by God, Thomism is unable to completely exonerate the Lord of his role in the affair.

The Solution of Independent Freedom

The Greeks came up with the idea of political freedom, but it is the biblical message alone which has made us conscious of *human* freedom, of its dramatic grandeur at the crossroads of history, of its essential distinctiveness in the world. Because of this message, stress was laid on the person—the Church Fathers, for example, came to increasingly stress free will the more they fought against the cosmic fatalism of late antiquity. The doctrine of the good creation of God, himself being absolutely good, also excludes the pagan notion of evil matter, for although the Fathers came under the influence of Neo-Platonism and made heavy concessions in explaining evil in terms of a 'nothingness', uncreated yet nevertheless(!) real, twin brother in a metaphysical sense to matter,¹ they began by relating this evil back to the will. These conditions were so joined to a *second* doctrine, one supposed to resolve the problem of the problems.

The explanation *in terms of freedom* seems to be a Christian original. It rejects the excuse behind the idea of evil's necessity in the university order. It avoids confusing evil with some metaphysical ingredient of reality. It is immediately attractive to modern thinkers. It exists in numerous versions, some highly speculative, others more down to earth and popularly accessible, but there are three characteristics found throughout the range of different versions. First, evil is considered a *possibility condition* of freedom—there would be no sense in saying that a creature is free if it were not possible, *a priori*, for that creature to do evil. Second, the *free* choice of the personal agent, man or angel, cannot (for the advocates of this solution) *be determined in advance* by God. And third, since freedom is one of the highest, if not the highest *value*, God was justified in 'taking the risk' of creating free agents; he cannot be held responsible for the bad choices of these agents. At first glance, it seems that this doctrine, in explicating the 'evil of evil', does better justice to the goodness of God and of his works than does the doctrine of universal order, but it needs to be questioned more closely on the nature of the divine sovereignty.

We will first lay out several versions of this view rather distant from biblical orthodoxy, then others somewhat nearer, then those placing themselves under the *Sola Scriptura*. A critical analysis of the view will conclude the chapter.

The méonic freedom of Nicolas Berdiaeff

The most exalted and explosive form, blazing and smoking, is without doubt that found in the work of Nicolas Berdiaeff (1874–1948). This Russian thinker, freed from Marxist influences, a 'theosophical Christian' as he classified himself,² was dubbed the 'captive of freedom',³ captivated by the passion and the cult of liberty! As he proclaims, without the slightest hesitation in his voice:

Freedom is the sole solution to the theodicy problem. The problem of evil constitutes the problem of freedom. If one does not understand freedom, one cannot grasp the irrational fact of the existence of evil in the divine world.⁴

The *irrational* fact ... Berdiaeff polemicizes against the 'Euclidian' mentality and immediately qualifies the freedom he proclaims:

At the origin of the world there is an irrational freedom rooted in the depths of nothingness, an abyss out of which spring the dark torrents of life, the place containing all possibilities. (...) This irrational freedom begets evil as well as good.

This freedom is the 'source of evil'. Berdiaeff at times refers to it as 'meonic' because it springs out of nothingness, out of the paradoxical

mê on of the Greeks ('that which is not', but of a sort of negation relative only to that of the weak negation particle *mê* rather than to the strong negation *ouk*).⁷ The intrepid thinker glories in his antinomies, which he uses simply to illustrate the basic irrationality of the freedom he adores: 'I confess to being virtually a Manichean dualist. So be it. "The world" is that which is evil ...'; yet in another place we find: 'I confess to being virtually a pantheistic monist. The world is divine by nature, man is divine by nature'.⁸ With Berdiaeff it is no use quibbling over minor details!

Even God boasts of no mastery over freedom. 'God is all-powerful with respect to being, but not with respect to nothingness, to freedom—that is why evil exists.'⁹ 'As Berdiaeff never tires of repeating, the fundamental error is to regard God as the Creator of freedom.'¹⁰ The bard of the abyss knows who he is up against. According to him, Saint Augustine, when faced with Pelagian rationalism, 'renounced freedom'; and later 'Saint Thomas of Aquinas, in the final analysis, rejected freedom as well.'¹¹ In reproving these two doctors, Berdiaeff rejects the entire tradition concerning God's sovereignty, fully aware of the consequences of this rejection: 'The divine life is a tragedy.'¹² God's intention, in effect, stumbles over an adverse causality, absolutely independent of him, such that he is stymied by it.

As an expert on abysses, Berdiaeff nevertheless resists the vertiginous pull of despair. He *knows* how the tragedy will end and perceives that indomitable freedom, source of evil as well as good, is indispensable to the Sense of the World. 'Without darkness there is no light. The good reveals itself and triumphs through the testing of evil.'¹³ 'The fall of the first Adam has a positive signification and a justification as a moment in the discovery of creativity, en route to the advent of Absolute-Man.'¹⁴ The dramatic story moves from primitive, ambivalent freedom to divine freedom (that of man deified by the Christ) freedom for which 'evil no longer exists,' which opposes itself to domestic freedom.¹⁵ In this way, despite the antinomies which effect even these propositions, Berdiaeff explains evil in terms of freedom.

Wilfred Monod—God at great cost

If we strip away from Berdiaeff's solution the dark illusions of Russian-style theosophy, we find ourselves not far from the views of the French pastor, Wilfred Monod. Monod, figure-head of 'social Christianity', an orator inclined to lyric effusions, sketched out his views in a lecture given in 1904 before wielding them in his book, *Le Probleme du bien* (1934). God's omnipotence must be excluded, in any case, with respect to this world; 'God tries but does not always succeed'.¹⁶ Morally, God emerges stronger from this metaphysical diminution; divinity is, in effect, initially conceived as moral

exigency—'God is the effort to transform reality'—rather than as Being and the cause of being. He even leaves direct charge over nature to a demiurge.¹⁷ Monod's conviction is reinforced by relying on eschatology and Christology: the true God is the God 'who is coming' and who *will be* omnipotent. His impotence reveals itself and its meaning on the cross of Golgotha, a demonstration of the suffering, imploring love which places itself at the mercy of the beloved.¹⁸

Is Wilfred Monod still being read? His views bear striking similarities to the latest theological fashion, the American school of 'Process Theology'. Of course, in the work of those emulating philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), tender eloquence has been replaced by metaphysical speculation and logical rigour while social messianism has been removed in favour of the cardinal theme of Process theology, that is, the divine immanence in the world, in evolving nature. In regard to God's connection with evil, however, the two are more or less the same.

At least with respect to his 'consistent' nature God is limited. In becoming, he progresses with the universe and cannot influence historical agents except through persuasion. André Gounelle compares him quite aptly to an orchestra conductor who cannot do all that he might want with his given instrumentalists but must, rather, work with their failings!¹⁹ For Whitehead himself, the 'fundamental conceptual finality' of all temporal being comes from God, 'but with the indeterminations which will bring about the decisions appropriate to this being'.²⁰ Daniel Day Williams, in proposing that God is revealed through human love, attributes to him a limitation due to the freedom of others, bringing about suffering and exposure to risk.²¹ David R. Griffin, in treating the theodicy issue *ex professo*, delivers a sort of theorem:

The entire real world will, of metaphysical necessity, be composed of beings endowed with a certain power of auto-determination, even vis-à-vis God, so that it is logically impossible for God to unilaterally impede all evil.²²

Without independence, there can be no reality proper. This is the axiom upon which Griffin bases his assurance.²³ And the entire school of thought thinks in approximately the same way.²⁴

Faced with evil, God's impotence is excusable. He wishes, searches, tries, strives—he 'does his best'. Instead of reproach, he deserves sympathy, indeed pity.²⁵ Yet since it was the divine power of persuasion which first pulled the cosmos out of chaos, it can also be asked in what way God escapes culpability (for his imprudence, perhaps) in having allowed such a world to emerge. John Cobb and David Griffin analyze good as enjoyment and evil as that which blocks enjoyment, be it either discord or weakness (that is, triviality)

when this weakness is unnecessary. Given these notions, they then conclude:

Leaving the finite domain in chaos when he could have stimulated it to become a world would have been in acquiescence to an unnecessary weakness on God's part. In order to be loving or moral, God's objective must be to overcome unnecessary weakness while avoiding as much discord as possible.²⁶

Apparently, God is justified in this because the sum of the enjoyments obtained through processive intensification prevails over the total sufferings so produced, or, in the absence of a sure prediction, at least because the game is worth the fight.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

On this side of the Atlantic it is the thought of Bonhoeffer regarding the 'weak God among us' which seems to take up and renew the Monodian paradox, shifting the accent from Golgotha to Gethsemane. Bonhoeffer hardly seeks to explain evil, yet his letters from prison are well-known, so much so that there is no need to treat them in detail. Let us note simply the double motivation behind the new theses which the theologian sketched out in his cell at Tegel and which he himself qualified as 'contestable'.²⁷ Spiritually, Bonhoeffer is reacting against pagan piety, against the paganization of Christian piety. Whining and self-centred, this form of religion which disheartens him tries to exploit God, when actually Jesus calls us to follow him. Theologically, Bonhoeffer constructs a Lutheran version of Karl Barth's Christological concentration, holding that if the dualism of Law and Gospel, of God 'naked' and God 'revealed' is combined with the Barthian concentration, then the God who is identical with Jesus abrogates the God of traditional metaphysics just as the Gospel abrogates the Law. One can no longer think of God in other terms—he is The One who has totally renounced his power.²⁸ Bonhoeffer's intention in this is not to establish the independence of freedom nor to make it a last resort for theodicy. Yet his testimony, formulas, and prestige have been 'salvaged', as one knows, in the service of a secular and libertarian theology. One Dorothee Sölle concludes her reflections on the identity of God in the world in this way:

If in the 19th century suffering was still the 'rock of atheism' one can say in our age that nothing so manifests God as his failures in the world (...) God is impotent and needs help (...) he makes himself dependent on us ... The time has now come to do something to help God.²⁹

The ethical vision of Immanuel Kant

Paul Ricoeur, who certainly knows his stuff, says that the essence of the moral vision of the world and of evil is the 'mutual "explication"

of evil in terms of freedom and of freedom in terms of evil'. 'Evil is an invention of freedom' and freedom 'is revealed in its profundity' as 'capable of digression, deviation, subversion, error'.³⁰ He quite rightly sees in the prolongation of the Old Testament an example of this ethical vision of the world in the 'idea of a freedom entirely responsible to and continually at the disposal of itself' as formulated by the rabbinic Pharisees.³¹ One recognizes in this the doctrine of the two tendencies implanted by the Creator, the *yétsér hattob* and the *yétsér hára*, between which the free will must constantly choose. And it is Kant who, moving beyond Augustine and Pelagius, brings this doctrine to perfection.³² And since Kant sufficiently preserved the imprint of pietism in his work and sufficiently desired to defend Christian 'belief', it is only appropriate that we include him in this brief survey.

Kant specified the *locus* of evil. In spite of the hegemony exercised over his thought by the antinomy of understanding and sensibility, of Law and nature, Kant discerned that the sensible impulse is not in itself evil. Rather, *evil comes from freedom*. It is the free will's overthrowing of the hierarchy of its motives which deserves to be qualified as evil. The subversion of the order wherein personal interest and natural motive are subjected to the moral Law is that which merits one's indignation. Freedom itself continues to be conceived as the 'absolute spontaneity of free-will'; when it chooses evil, it does seem to reveal the *Wilkür* in its nature, the 'power of contraries' as Ricoeur puts it.³³ Again, one is not far from the idea of evil as a possibility condition of freedom as such. Yet the theory of 'radical evil', developed along with the aforementioned ideas in the first part of Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), introduces a different orientation.³⁴ Kant asserts that within all humankind there is a penchant for evil which contradicts the ultimate aim of good. This commonplace of freedom, contracted by freedom, can not have come from any temporal event (for Kant there was no historical Fall)—it is *inexplicable*, its origin is *inscrutable*. Radical evil hovers like a shadow of mystery over the explanation in terms of freedom. Yet for all that it isn't some badly assimilated theological resolve, a dogmatic spatter which, as Goethe complained, might have soiled the philosopher's cloak.³⁵ The assurance Kant maintained of the free-will's capacity to overcome the evil penchant, of converting itself through its own resources, shows that he never actually departed from the 'moral vision of the world and of evil'.

It is not easy to find and designate original thinkers on evil who follow in the line of Kant. The work of Jean Nabert comes to mind, but Nabert avoided using Christian labels.³⁶ Etienne Borne, whose brilliant essay eclipsed many others, attached himself to the Kantian tradition in his criticism of unifying 'wisdoms', in his reliance on the personalist Cogito which shatters the All, in the sense of exigency

which calls upon faith beyond all knowledge, the faith that 'reason is right'.³⁷ But evil according to Borne is much more the evil of death than that of fault, much more metaphysical evil than disdain for the moral imperative.³⁸

Kierkegaard

What can one say of Kierkegaard? Isn't he considered *the* thinker concerning both sin and free choice? Didn't he sharpen the Kantian disjunction between knowledge and faith to the point of most glittering antithesis? Wasn't he, too, transfixed by the exigency of *duty*? Even when presenting the idea of the (teleological) suspension of the ethical, he does so in the name of an 'absolute duty towards God', who relativizes what is ordinarily called ethics.³⁹ Interpreting the connection between evil and freedom in Kierkegaard's work seems to us a task of the utmost delicacy. At first glance, the psychology in his *Concept of Dread*, in laying bare the 'real possibility of sin' found in the vertiginous dread of freedom,⁴⁰ seems to follow directly along the line of explanation in terms of independent freedom. Later, in his treatment of despair (which is sin, the sole sickness unto death), 'Anticlimax' (pseudonym for 'Christian') writes:

From whence comes despair? It comes from that connection wherein the synthesis (which is man) is related to itself because God, in making this connection of man, allows it as it were to escape from his hand, so that from now on it's up to this connection to guide itself. This connection is the spirit, the me, and therein lies the responsibility upon which every despair will always hinge ...⁴¹

A me which escapes from God's hand seems to be an independent sort of existence, having in itself the power of evil. Yet Kierkegaard's unflinching insistence on a 'qualitative leap' when sin is at issue shows that things are not quite so simple. Kierkegaard detects the snare:

... sin represents itself as freedom without stooping to explain how this is so. To begin by turning freedom into a free-will (a move which is always false, cf. Leibniz) capable of choosing Good just as well as Evil is to render all explanation impossible from the start.⁴²

He is concerned in this section to speak against any idea of sin as necessary, as realization of the power of free-will. If so many people find this explanation plausible, it is only because 'thoughtlessness comes most naturally to most people', despite the work of Chrysippus, Cicero, Leibniz, to which Kierkegaard attaches himself, in denouncing this 'empty argument', this 'hollow reasoning', this 'lazy sophistry'.⁴³

It is only after the qualitative leap, once sin has imposed itself, that the dread of nothingness 'appears as the preliminary condition wherein man is pulled away from himself'⁴⁴—a bit of retrospection, one could say, without one having the right to proceed upon the logical path in the opposite direction. As for freedom itself, it is 'the formula which describes that state of myself when despair has been entirely eradicated', a statement with Augustinian overtones: 'in orienting itself towards itself, in wanting to be itself, the me plunges across its own transparency into the power which established it.'⁴⁵ Of course, Kierkegaard continued to treat the possibility of evil as a sort of preliminary reality and to make nothingness the correlative of freedom, but his intention is neither to glorify freedom's independence nor to dissipate the enigma of the surging up of evil.

God's withdrawal

There are many among the advocates of the solution in terms of freedom who would like to reconcile the independence of free-will with the omnipotence of God. They come together above all, in the vicinity of orthodoxy, for reasons which are easy enough to guess. The mediating idea seems fairly to glow: it is that of the voluntary withdrawal of God, of divine self-limitation. God *could* determine all that occurs, but *doesn't*. He freely steps aside so that his creature might be itself, indeed that his free creature might be free.

The Cabbala, with its sentiment for paradox, approached this idea under the name of *zimzoum*.⁴⁶ The 'neo-orthodox' dogmatician, Emil Brunner, evokes the idea of *kenosis* and says without beating around the bush:

The maximum of the limitation which God imposes on himself constitutes the maximum of real being enjoyed vis-à-vis him, the *free* vis-à-vis which in freedom responds to the word of the creator (...) From now on we represent at which point God consented to limit himself and divest himself in order to achieve this end, in order to realize it with respect to a creature who, in defying God, then abuses its freedom as creature.⁴⁷

François Laplantine abandons the neo-Calvinism from which he had drawn a large part of his inspiration to conclude in rather typical fashion:

God did not create robots, puppets, or marionettes, but free human beings, free even to reject Him, to say no to him, to put him on the Cross. And so they did, but only because the God of Jesus Christ is not a despot, a monarch, a sovereign of unlimited powers. The God of Jesus Christ pulls back from creation, renouncing the immediate consummation of man and the world in order to allow man the freedom to project himself and so make history. The unconsummated state of the world is the cause of evil.⁴⁸

These are hardly isolated examples.⁴⁹ In the evangelical ranks, two famous apologists discreetly resort to the same idea. Clive Staples Lewis, in the midst of describing with accuracy and finesse the delicious rapture at God's handing over of Paradise, finds there the possibility of sin, that is, 'the mere existence of a "me", the simple fact of saying "I", imply from the beginning the danger of self-idolatry'. He calls this fact 'the "weak point" in the notion itself of creation, the risk which God apparently judged was right to take.'⁵⁰ Francis Schaeffer, stretching the Reformed tradition out of which he came, presents as a solution to the problem of evil the fact that God 'created man as an undetermined person', as a man 'who could choose to obey God's commandment and so love Him or else choose to revolt against Him'.⁵¹ Stephen T. Davis, critic that he is of process theology, also manages to speak of the 'risk' which God knowingly took in creating this world. He admits that 'God *potentially* controls all events but does not do so *actually*'.⁵² This reconciliation of God's omnipotence (or lordship) with the existence of evil, primarily moral evil since physical evil is only a consequence, seems to have a rather broad-based following.

Evaluation

Let us raise our flag without timidity. In our opinion, the efforts to resolve the problem of evil by appealing to freedom fail. Our criticism, however, must first pick out the strong points of the propositions we have reviewed. The majority of them involve at least the denunciation of any metaphysical interpretation of evil.⁵³ They refuse to make evil a necessity. They preserve the antithesis between Good and Evil without trying to salvage the dissonance in the good name of the symphony. They thus respect the truth of the view that evil is inexcusable and unjustifiable. If moral evil is the unjust (ungrateful, senseless ...) *response* to the Creator and if freedom in the creature is the *power of response*, ideas which we do ratify, then one must well conclude that evil comes via this created freedom. Scripture first and foremost links evil to the will, to the heart (the faculty of choice). The prophets in particular implicate freedom:

When I called, you did not answer,
When I spoke, you did not listen;
But you did what was evil in my eyes,
And chose what I did not delight in.

(Isaiah 65:12, repeated in the 3rd person in 66:4)

Zechariah sums up his message in much the same way (Zech. 7:11f.) while Jesus himself strongly confirms the idea: he laments over Jerusalem's evil *will* (Mt. 23:37) and, above all, pinpoints the heart as the *exclusive* source of moral evil (Mt. 15:10-20), sin is *the*

evil, that which renders man subject to physical evils, which makes him vulnerable in the world (Gen. 3:16–19; Rom. 5:12). In the end, despite the apparent conflict with several passages, we believe that the thesis according to which God is never the *author* of evil is the biblical one. God neither causes evil in any direct manner nor does he produce it of himself. Evil is defined in terms of the disposition contrary to God, in terms of dissimilarity with him, and God is in no way complacent towards it. Over against pagan and paganized ideas on the subject, the ‘ethical vision’ of evil and the doctrines derived from it evidence a priceless lucidity.

Yet such praise does not extend to the other points ... Let us begin by looking at the attempt to safeguard God’s omnipotence by appealing to the idea of his self-limitation. It must be pointed out that if God really wants the free-will to operate without him, he must withdraw himself from an enormous sphere of influence. It is, mind you, the entire history of the world which our freedoms shape according to their choices (if, for instance, Cleopatra had opted for plastic surgery, the face of the world would have been changed). Or perhaps God simply doesn’t interfere and no longer controls anything of importance; or perhaps he arranges to limit the consequences of these choices, no longer playing ‘the game’ but reducing the drama of freedom to an unimportant superficiality. It is rare to find a theologian advocating this withdrawal position who actually denotes the necessary extent of this withdrawal. And what gives them the right to speak at all of some free *self*-limitation on God’s part? The entire logic of their argumentation shows that God *cannot* determine freedom (as they conceive of it). He can, of course, constrain and suppress it, but he cannot determine the free act as such, *even if he wanted to*. There is something law-like in it which is imposed on God, a necessity which *obliges him* to limit himself.⁵⁴ But isn’t this law just another expression of the divine nature, similar to the impossibility of God’s lying or to his making of square circles? There seems no reason to suppose so, and indeed it is significant that in other places one speaks of withdrawal and self-limitation in ways which assume these words do not bring to mind the absurdity of square circles. The result of this has been that the most consistent thinkers of the group are also the least orthodox, the ones who simply renounce the idea of divine omnipotence. From the start God must take into account a factor independent of him.

The false clarity of the idea of limitation, like the conviction that God made man a puppet whose choices are determined, depends on the most profound trait of the independent free-will defence, that is, that of *anthropomorphism*, or perhaps one might say ‘cosmomorphism’. The relation of God to creatures is represented in a manner similar to that operative in combinations of earthly forces. One creature must pull back in order that another may take its place (each

is metaphysically exclusive of the others); any earthly force, physical or psychological, in determining my choices destroys my freedom. *And the action of God is imagined along these same lines!* One forgets what 'God' signifies. One forgets his infinite presence which penetrates every creature and is the only thing keeping the creature from immediately vanishing into non-being (Ps. 104:29). One forgets that it is in him alone that every creature lives and moves and has its being, according to all the aspects of this being (Acts 17:28, cf. verse 25). One forgets the lordship of God, the meaning of his Name to which he cannot be unfaithful. One forgets that with respect to the Absolute one must think in absolute terms: independence with respect to him is *absolute* independence, that is, by definition, a rival *divinity*—and the supposition of numerous divinities borders on incoherence. One forgets what 'God' signifies; one uses the term, but it is a ratiocination devoid of *thought*. A little god does his best but incurs the Tillichian reproach for calling on a God beyond himself, a God who transcends him and is worthy to be called God. Berdiaeff is the only one proud enough to indicate the *mythologies* which inspire him.⁵⁵ His is a glorious defeat even if it implies the fall of reason: a *defeat* because the enslavement to paganism is evident, but *glorious* because Berdiaeff takes account of the immensity involved in attributing independence to human free-will. He at least does not share the incredible myopia of those who take this attribution as if it were self-evident and posed no problems for the believing monotheist!

Criticism of anthropomorphism is based upon the biblical idea of God: 'the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God' (1 Tim. 1:17), Sovereign Lord (*despotês*, Acts 4:24, Jude 4, Rev. 6:10), *Pantocrator*, that is, 'Sovereign of unlimited powers' (found nine times in Revelation), to say nothing of the title 'Lord'. Of course, these titles do not contain the pejorative nuance which Laplantine attaches to them, nor do they justify the view of man as robot or marionette (let's not confuse the clever subtleties of redaction with the elements of demonstration). Yet it is not only the global vision, but also the particular givens of Scripture which work against the solution in terms of independent freedom. It is here that the decisive criterion is found. (As we shall return to these givens in our third study, we will content ourselves here with sketching out the major outlines). No part of Scripture suggests that God ever suspends the exercise of his sovereign power with respect to the least occurrence in the world. He who 'operates according to the counsel of his will' not only 'produces the will and the ability' in those who obey him, but also includes in his Plan the evil acts of those who transgress his preceptive will! The various texts declare this fact in a general fashion and demonstrate it in several specific cases—even those attacks *in which He is the ultimate target* depend upon the decreed will of God.

No part of Scripture suggests that man's choice is independent or 'absolutely spontaneous' (cf. Prov. 21:1) nor that this is a necessary condition of his responsibility (cf. Rom. 1:18–2:16). No part of Scripture explains the appearance of evil by virtue of its being an original possibility condition of freedom. No part of Scripture teaches that the possibility of evil is the ineluctable ransom for the creation of free creatures. No part introduces the idea of some 'risk' taken by God.

Modern thinkers have allowed themselves to be taken in by the paradox of 'God's impotence', no doubt because they enjoy the flashiness of paradoxes and above all because they centre on Golgotha, Gethsemane, and 'kenosis'.⁵⁶ They do not take care in following this path to avoid being ambushed by old heresies. Even in Christology, kenotism is a pseudo-solution: the humiliation of the Son in 'the days of the flesh' does not abolish his role as sustainer of the world, the Christ *comprehensor* distinguished from the Christ *viator*.⁵⁷ And most important for our subject—to mix up the Persons of the Trinity is to topple into the abyss of modalism. If the Son did not use his divine omnipotence during the life he simultaneously led as a true man, if he suffered and died as a man to fulfil the indispensable expiatory sacrifice, the same things can never be said of the Father. In Gethsemane, the Son renounces the natural human desire to avoid death in order to execute the Plan of the Father, who could have instead sent legions of angels to his defence. To think of the Cross as the impotence of God is to short-circuit the evidence. Apostolic preaching proclaims it rather as the triumph of God, following the wonderful detour dictated by his mysterious wisdom in realization of the plan fixed 'before the foundation of the world'. Not, it must be added, that one sees in this the virtue of paradox, but rather the shedding of blood in bringing about pardon.

So why does the 'solution in terms of independent freedom' enjoy such wide popularity? It does because it has germinated in a nicely prepared compost: its idea of freedom constitutes the major presupposition of *humanism*, the ideological consensus still in force today. The more or less conscious heirs of humanism might doubt whether there is freedom, but they are sure that if it exists, it requires independence and indeterminacy. And it is just a small step from this to situating the origin of evil in the power of freedom. Yet even with respect to freedom one cannot cover over conflicts with Scripture (and experience!). The glorification of free-will stumbles over all the attestations concerning the 'enslaved-will', to adopt a term used by Luther in retorting to the claim of the prince of humanists.⁵⁸ From Jeremiah to the Apostle Paul, the denunciation of evil desire is accompanied by pointing out the enslavement of sinful nature and the servitude of the flesh. Under these conditions, the hypothesis of a free-will conceived as independent, even before the advent of sin,

turns out to be unrealistic. Kant wanted to take 'radical evil' into account, but as Laplantine saw so well he didn't sound out the true gravity of evil nor its wickedness; indeed, he was unable to reach the depths of biblical radicality by way of humanism.⁵⁹

Refuted by Scripture, the explanations of evil found in this second group of our classification scheme reveal yet other insufficiencies when subjected to more rigorous analysis. They are incapable of maintaining to the end their opposition to the metaphysical solutions (again, Berdiaeff's work serves here as a mirror generally reflecting that of the entire family). If, in effect, freedom is understood to essentially contain, from the beginning, the 'real possibility' of evil,⁶⁰ then evil lies therein as a metaphysical fact, it receives an ontological status (as the *mê on*) within creation. It is not for nothing that evil is actually necessary to the definition of freedom. At one stroke we have evil firmly integrated, by implication, in the ingredients of being.⁶¹ Or perhaps one accepts dualism or admits that God created the real possibility of evil. Suddenly God is culpable again (can one indeed call the creation *entirely* good?) and one must search for an excuse. The slippery slope towards the finely crafted excuse of the rationalists of our first group is unavoidable: God was right in creating potential evil *because of the good for which it was the price*. Such a fine thing is freedom! One ends up with a 'rational' justification of evil in supposing that evil must be actually possible for man to be free. Hasn't one thus removed the scandalous prick, once again taken the evil out of evil?

It is one thing to note that evil arises out of freedom, but any theory which inflates this truth into some explanation of, some solution to, the problem of evil is nothing but an optical illusion.

The Dialectical Solution

The third realm of discourse used in Christianity to rationally account for evil distances itself more than the other two from everyday ways of thinking. Disconcerting, obscure due to blinding brilliance or impenetrable profundity, it has captured little of the crowd (despite its diluted presence in all areas of modern thought). The intellectual fanciers of speculation are easily tempted by it, they of quick wit and verbal acrobatics, too aware of the aggressive power of evil to accept the 'wise' discourse of the Thomists, too clear on the bonds of freedom, on the inane pretension of absolute independence to be content with the 'ethical' solution. For them, dialectic is the answer.

The thinkers of this third type differ among themselves, perhaps even more so than the advocates of the 'solutions' already criticized, but there are two principal affirmations which they hold in common. First, *evil is for them present from the beginning of the world* as a unified power opposed to Good. This evil is often called non-being or nothingness—once again the *mê on*—but a present reality is ascribed

to it, either *in* God or along *with* God. In the Augustinian and Thomist tradition, the nothingness is not evil itself but is limited to rendering every creature fallible—actual failure occurs subsequently. Even in Berdiaeff, the abyss of nothingness engenders an ambivalent sort of freedom. Here, however, nothingness is clearly the negative. Does this imply another wearying load of pessimism? On the contrary, changing the for to against, or rather the against to for brings about a conclusion of the most optimistic sort! And it is here that the second key proposition is found. *Evil*, or at least the *confrontation* it implies, *plays a positive role*. There is a certain ‘fecundity’ attached to the negative because it, in turn, must be denied and thus reality is set in *motion*, being escapes mortal stasis and experiences progress. This accent on the dynamism born of contradiction is what makes ‘dialectical’ thought. When the representatives of the other philosophical or theological families celebrate the dissonance sounded in the service of the symphony, considering the power to do evil a ransom of the greatest value, they still fall short of dialectical thought (in its modern sense). Due to the dialectic, it seems that one can push the idea of black realism a long way without sugar-coating the power of evil aggression and yet allow hope to rebound, to spring back in keeping with the Christian message.

We will distinguish between three versions of this idea according to the theme which appears to predominate. The posterity of Germanic mysticism is fascinated by the depth of the abyss; it feels most at ease in the area of *Religionsphilosophie*. The second tendency is Hegelian, that of the most dialectic dialectic, centered on the kenosis and the Cross of Christ; from this centre one reinterprets the doctrine of the Trinity. Karl Barth holds to a position somewhat apart from these two, being much more concerned to work within the dogmatic heritage of the Church; his dialectic is used to glorify the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. Because of the very way in which the dialectical solution is set up, our concluding evaluation of it can be put more briefly than was the case for the preceding types of explanation.

Jacob Boehme: The dialectic of the abyss

The precursor, indeed the father of modern dialectic has been dubbed the ‘philosophus teutonicus’, though a shoemaker by trade: Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). He is the one who, with an abundance of crude metaphors, made the breakthrough. Earlier, in antiquity, Heraclitus and Empedocles had indeed meditated on the play of contraries, but they saw in this the secret of equilibrium, not of progress. Stimulated perhaps by gleanings from gnostic tradition, Boehme, that ingenious theosophist, received his revelation right in his workshop at Görlitz: one Sunday morning while fixing a tin plate to the wall he noticed a ‘lovely Jovian ray’ shining on the dark floor at the back of the shop and came to realize that light exists only by

means of the opposition of darkness.⁶² The no necessary to the yes, the no which urges on the yes—the idea of dialectic was on its way! It was only fitting that Boehme's first book was entitled *Aurora*.

Boehme consolidated his intuition by looking within himself: 'the heavens, the earth, every being, and God himself lie at the heart of man'.⁶³ There he discovered the boil of contraries which was present in the beginning, in the primordial *Ungrund*. He then proceeds rather audaciously to write:

All things exist by yes or no, be they divine, diabolic, terrestrial or whatever one likes. The 'one' as yes is power and love, the truth of God and God in person. But it cannot be recognized as such without the no, and without the no there would be neither joy nor grandeur nor sensibility.⁶⁴

As Bloch summarizes it, 'there is thus at the heart of God an evil, diabolical element; the flip side of the divine is the demonic ...'⁶⁵ Boehme justifies this antithesis, even in God, due to its fecundity: 'the one is always opposed to the other, not hostilely but in order that it might move and manifest itself'.⁶⁶ Humanity, identified with Christ, changes the work of Lucifer to good, and in this way the various defections and revolts, the sins of Paradise and of Babel are also justified.⁶⁷ Ernst Bloch describes how it all ends:

All then opens onto a pantheism which carries in itself the antagonism postulated by the dialectic, an antagonism transposed into the divine centre of nature ('centrum naturae') while awaiting the divine nature to abolish itself in the process of the seven abundant forces—fire being the first metamorphosis, man being the second and the quintessence of the seven cosmic forces—and along with it the world's suffering rooted in desire with all its qualities ('Qualitäten'). In this way there is reconciliation in the end, a return to the one, and the suppression of all dissension.⁶⁸

Hope in a perfect reconciliation often accompanies the dialectic faith.

Paul Tillich

The German Romantics plunged with delight into the obscurity of the Bohemian *Ungrund*, among them Schelling (1775–1854), the brilliant younger contemporary of Hegel and man of the two-fold philosophical career (before and after the grand Hegelian glory). It was on this same Schelling that a young Lutheran university student named Paul Tillich defended his doctoral thesis in 1911 in Germany. Paul Tillich seems to us to be the great thinker of our century in the tradition of Boehme and the dialectic of the abyss. His influence, having spread out across Europe in just the last twenty years, is reason enough for us to be interested in his views.

Being-itself is at once the *foundation* and the *abyss* of all beings, as Tillich loves to reiterate.⁶⁹ Without doubt this formula has been thought out by playing upon twists of the German language, putting together the terms *Grund* and *Abgrund*, or with an even more Bohemian twist, *Urgrund* and *Ungrund*. Being-itself grounds what is, but transcends and so denies what is only finite. This can be said in another way, using Tillich's own words: 'being is essentially bound to non-being';⁷⁰ 'there cannot be a world without the dialectical participation of non-being in being'.⁷¹ In effect, finitude is denied by the abyss insofar as it implies mixture with non-being, a new sort of *mê on*.⁷² And since being-itself is not *a* being with a distinct existence, the polemical relation of being and non-being in the world must be said to be 'contained' *in itself*: 'being "embraces" itself and non-being. Being includes non-being "inside" itself as that which is eternally present and eternally surmounted in the development of the divine life.'⁷³ God (the other name of being-itself) then 'is the eternal process in which separation occurs and reunion surmounts it,'⁷⁴ in which 'the demonical, the antidivine principle which nevertheless participates in the power of the divine'⁷⁵ must be subdued.

The German-American theologian-philosopher did not have a mythomania nor was he a visionary of any radical sort. Why then the mythological resonances of his language? Tillich is consistent in his rejection of supranaturalism—if God is not being above the world and if the negative is felt in the world, God must be represented as struggling with this negative. Tillich opts above all for an ontology of *power*—being is power of being, which suggests that there is some resistance to overcome,⁷⁶ 'we would not be able to even think "being" without a double negation: we must think being as the negation of the negation of being'.⁷⁷ Non-being is indeed that which must be denied, that which produces *dread* in the conscience, the dread with three faces like non-being itself: the dread of fate and death, the dread of the void and the absurd, the dread of guilt and damnation.⁷⁸ And if alienation (which Tillich incredulously analyzes as *hybris*, concupiscence) is distinguished from dreaded finitude, if the rupture with the foundation awaits the passage from essence to existence,⁷⁹ it is 'inevitably linked' to the realization of self as *finite freedom*⁸⁰—'at this point the doctrine of creation is rejoined to that of the fall'.⁸¹ Due to non-being, the existential divorce, mediated by freedom, is fatal.⁸² The dialectic thus explains that which we call evil.

Little inclined to utopian talk, Tillich does not promise total Reconciliation as triumphally as his dialectician colleagues are ordinarily wont to do. He proclaims the New Being conqueror of alienation; he uses the symbol of the Kingdom of God, but he does not await a golden age in history nor anything beyond history—the thrust is rather to call forth, here and now, the *courage to be*. Despite the absurd, sin, and death, let's believe that meaning, acceptance,

and life do prevail! The reversal of evil into good thus remains rather discrete. But it can be perceived when one appreciates the courageous affirmation of Tillichian valour (which couldn't happen without conflict), and even more clearly when one considers the *Model* of the courage to be, that is, the effort of being-itself 'in eternally overcoming its own non-being'.⁸³ In effect, 'it is non-being which turns God into a living God. Without the No which he in himself and in his creature must surmount, the Yes which God says to himself would be without life.'⁸⁴ In Tillich as well one ends up with a justification of the negative by the good which its presence provokes; again, evil works for the affirmation of life.

Hegel: The dialectic of the cross

Paul Tillich attaches the courage to be, the victory over alienation, to the symbols of Christianity—to the 'continual renunciation by the Jesus who is Jesus of the Jesus who is the Christ', as in the evangelical image, that is, to Jesus' self-negation in the service of God; and to justification by faith, which must be understood as the 'act of accepting that one is accepted without there being any person or thing doing the accepting' during the night of doubt and absence of meaning.⁸⁵ But given the evidence in Tillich's case this link is rather loose.⁸⁶ Our second dialectical strain is wedded much closer to the themes of the biblical message. It looks for its inspiration to the Cross.

Hegel! His name dominates, overwhelms. He is '*our* Plato', as François Châtelet expresses it, the one who determines the modern discussion just as Plato determined what constitutes philosophy.⁸⁷ We recoil before the 'terrifying' task of doing justice to the Hegelian system.⁸⁸ But one cannot fail to see the role of evil at its centre. Each of us can recall with what disheartening pointlessness, to Hegel's taste, 'the seriousness, pain, patience, and work of the negative' saves us.⁸⁹ The Spirit always denies and *thus* realizes itself—it opposes itself as Idea in setting up the finite; then in denying this negation it reconciles itself to itself, becoming infinite *for itself* to the extent of the plenitude of the concrete Universal. As Kojève summarizes it, 'the source and origin of human reality is the *Nothingness* or the power of *Negativity*, which realizes and manifests itself only through the transformation of the given *identity* of *being* in creative *contradiction* to "dialectical" or historical *becoming*.'⁹⁰ Hegel goes so far as to speak of the 'magical force' of the extended sojourn of the Spirit beside the Negative.⁹¹ The Negative includes what one would ordinarily call evil. Suffering and death—the "dialectical" or anthropological philosophy of Hegel is, in the final analysis, a *philosophy of death*'.⁹² Violence and war—the recognition of persons demands a bloody struggle in which one must risk one's life;⁹³ war:

preserves the moral (sittliche) health of the peoples ... just as the movement of the wind keeps the water of the lake from stagnating ... for what is [as Man] negative—or—negator of by nature (which is Action), must remain negative—or—negator and must not become something fixed—and—stable (Festes).⁹⁴

All the passions which humiliate law and morality are the instruments of progress, hidden from the actors through the ruse of Reason.⁹⁵ Hegel is able to distinguish the 'evil' of negativity in general as the obstinate particularity, rather than universality, of the natural will in choosing itself. Yet this evil itself is necessary, an inevitable historico-logical stage, and if it 'must not be', this means only that it must be gone beyond.⁹⁶ Not that Hegel allows himself to move in the direction of any superficial optimism—no such rose-water for him! 'No pessimist has ever painted a gloomier portrait of history than the one presented to us by Hegel. (...) Having cleared the field of all morality and all Eudemonism ... (he) accepts everything with his unshakeable faith in the rationality of the event.'⁹⁷ Since the wound of evil is ontologically inevitable, since it is the condition for the growth of the Spirit, and since it will heal without leaving a scar, Hegel, who understands all, pardons all:

He thus pronounces the absolute 'yes' of the spirit's reconciliation to itself directly out of the action of history, henceforth absolutely understood because absolutely pardoned. This is the principle of the Hegelian theodicy in action.⁹⁸

Due to the negativity which moves the life of the Absolute, which encompasses all, there is a theodicy. As Papaioannov nicely puts it, 'the "calvary" of history will be at once theogony, theophany, and theodicy'.⁹⁹ With this last term Hegel defines the work he is proposing and stresses that 'the evil in the universe, including moral evil, must be understood and the thinking spirit must reconcile itself with the negative.'¹⁰⁰

It was via a variety of routes, of course, that the (self-styled) 'Lutheran' philosopher arrived at his justification of God and of the World (the world being a phase of God). His reading of Fichte could have suggested to him the positive necessity of the negative—the Me sets itself up in opposing itself. The very lively sense of the decrepitude of all things and the influence of the Romantic entwining of life and death taught Hegel to see in the negative the secret of every life, not to mention the experience of the spirit's inquietude and the uprooting implied in the free act. One could demonstrate, we believe, that the suppression of every haughty and judicial insistence ('God is dead') depends upon a dialectical conception, that is, one integrating contradiction.¹⁰¹ Hegel was impressed by the nobility of the warrior's courage; he perceived the spiritual uplift involved in

overcoming fear, the clear decision to expose oneself to supreme danger and face death. More profoundly, he presents the new interpretation of work as realization of the self—his dialectic is an absolutization of a work whose God knows no Sabbath;¹⁰² if there is joy only through the trouble one has taken, then the negative is necessary, indeed preferable and so justified. Yet the primary inspiration of the former student in theology at the *Stift* in Tübingen does seem to have been *Christian*, linked to the Gospel. It is the *Concept* veiled by the religious *Representation* which he wishes to extract, that in Christianity which elevates religion to its culminating point.¹⁰³ The *alienation* necessary for the spirit to accede to the concrete and so realize itself is a philosophical translation of the kenosis formulated in Philippians 2. The role of the negative operates on the level of a 'speculative Good Friday'—where else, other than in the Gospel, does the most horrible crime give birth to the broadest reconciliation, a reconciliation brought about communally by the Spirit? There is no let-up in style when Hegel talks of history as the *Calvary* of the Absolute. One cannot imagine a more glorious theodicy—the *entire* tragedy is salvaged, its sign is reversed, and all from the starting point of the Cross!

Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann, the Reformed dogmatician of ecumenical fame at Tübingen, is today the one most strikingly bringing the Hegelian heritage to fruition. The multitude of references to Hegel in his major works attests to his extensive reading of the philosopher. Of course, he also often wears the glasses of the neo-Marxists, of Ernst Bloch and the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer). He supplements his work richly with other readings, taking for example from Jewish thinkers and Dr. Adrienne von Speyr of Basel. His recourse to the various potentialities in history, latent and expressed, gives his discourse a definite vitality—his idea of non-being mixed with being in creation, for example, awakens the ancient musings of the Greeks.¹⁰⁴ But first and foremost he is indebted to Hegel. Extolling the virtues of a *Realdialektik*, he himself has declared that it is his intention to 'bring the notion of paradox linked with Kierkegaard together with the most all-encompassing dialectic of Hegel and Marx'.¹⁰⁵

The Hegelian thread in Moltmann is brought out starkly in his views on evil. Already in his *Theology of Hope*, his borrowing of the expressions 'cross of the present', 'cross of reality' universalizes the sense of Christ's pain and suffering.¹⁰⁶

In his *The Crucified God*, Moltmann eloquently—in our opinion Moltmann is *first of all* an orator—lays out his new dialectical theology for which the Crucified One is the 'criterion'.¹⁰⁷ Extrapolating from the cry of Jesus found in Mark, 'My God, my God, why hast

thou forsaken me?', Moltmann remarks that 'the forsakenness on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is an event in God himself, a dissension within God—"God versus God"—if one must furthermore maintain that Jesus testified to and lived the truth of God'.¹⁰⁸ Insisting on this *dissension*, he perceives 'an enmity manifested and surmounted in God himself', drawing from this the theological-political consequence that enmity ought to be abolished.¹⁰⁹ If God is love, this is due to an 'internal opposition in God' so that 'God surmounts himself'.¹¹⁰

The kenosis theme inspires Moltmann as do the remarkable Jewish speculations on the Shekinah (the Glory of YHWH), humiliated and dragging through the dust.¹¹¹ What can be more Hegelian than this description of the theology of the cross?

[Because] it sees the nothingness itself which is incorporated in the being of God revealing itself in the death of Jesus in the nothingness and establishing itself there, it converts the general impression of universal decrepitude into the perspective of hope in universal liberation.¹¹²

Moltmann cites with approbation the preface of *Phenomenology of the Spirit* on the 'magical power' of the sojourn alongside the negative.¹¹³ Such a theology must take exception to the traditional distinction between 'God in himself' and 'God for us'—'It is not some divine nature separated from humans, but the human history of Christ which must become the "being" of God'.¹¹⁴ The Trinity proceeds out of the cross, as in Hegel; one must not in any case think of it 'as if the Trinity existed as some preliminary prerequisite as such in the divine nature'.¹¹⁵ 'But what sense is there then in speaking of "God"? I think that the unity of the tense dialectical history of the Father, Son, and Spirit at the cross on Golgotha can—after the fact, so to speak—be designated as "God".'¹¹⁶ Theism is overtaken due to the negation—'a trinitarian theology of the cross sees God in the negative and thus the negative in God and is, in this dialectical manner "panentheist".' This negative comprehends the most abominable evil: 'Auschwitz is also taken into God himself, that is, taken into the pain of the Father, into the sacrifice of the Son, and into the power of the Spirit'.¹¹⁷

In this way Moltmann rejoins Hegel: 'We take part in the historical process of the God-Trinity'.¹¹⁸

Regarding evil and its role, however, there are some significant differences between Hegel and Moltmann. Moltmann personally seems more sensible to the scandal of personal suffering. His passion for the theodicy problem is born of the experience of the great collective tragedies of our time.¹¹⁹ He particularly stresses political evil, which for our generation has replaced cosmological evil in the

foreground.¹²⁰ Yet he does not neglect evil's other forms, such as neurosis, metaphysical meaninglessness, and *death*, for which one is not comforted by the thought of some pleasing posterity.¹²¹ He does not want to rest satisfied with a *speculative* Good Friday but to move on from there to the *historical* Good Friday.¹²² He basically rejects Hegel's panlogism and this is why in his view no dialectical consolation for Maidanek and Hiroshima can be found.¹²³ It is not the necessity of cosmic Reason which appeases the tormented heart, but the proclamation of a God who becomes himself in taking on evil through love. His being the only one capable of thus overcoming evil gives us hope.

To the extent to which Moltmann distances himself from Hegel, one does not find a distinct theodicy in his work. But because he continues to so often depend upon Hegelian modes of thought,¹²⁴ even in the general economy of his doctrine—for example, his conviction that without the negative there would be neither life nor love—and because he clearly ends up with a universal salvation,¹²⁵ we will consider Moltmann's theodicy a solution along Hegelian lines—blurred, broken off, but recognizable.

The dialectic of grace

Karl Barth would have raised his eyebrows at finding himself placed in the company of this chapter. Paul Tillich? He has hardly any appreciation for him; Barthians and Tillichians in the United States do not get on well together. Hegel? Barth is the one who defined the Hegelian system as the greatest attempt (*Versuch*), but also the greatest temptation (*Versuchung*) for the Christian thinker. The dialectic which provides the current heading for the theology of the 'early' Barth, between the two wars, comes from Kierkegaard, implacable foe of Hegel. And yet ... Hans Urs von Balthasar thought he perceived in Barthian thought 'a sort of congeniality' with that of Hegel.¹²⁶ Even if the dialectic is original (which it is), it too furnishes a solution to the problem of evil. Our exposition will concentrate on this aspect of Barthian thought, taking for granted a general knowledge of the work of the greatest dogmatician of this century.

The name determines. Karl Barth directs the train of his reflections along the track leading to the goal by starting with a careful choice of terms. He principally designates evil as the Nothingness, *das Nichtige*. According to the translator, the word implies in German 'the idea of noxiousness, of nuisance, of negative but active power'.¹²⁷ Our dictionaries stress rather connotations of vanity and futility. In any case, the name of Nothingness, currently preferred to *das Böse*, indicates the adoption of an *ontological* perspective—the problem of evil is treated in terms of being, non-being, and negation. This characteristic merits close attention, because although it is characteristic of Barthian thought, it sometimes passes unnoticed

under the surface of the biblical language used by the theologian. Barth, of course, does not stop with the theme of the Wholly-Other or with 'the infinite qualitative difference between time and eternity', metaphysical problems par excellence; but, as Henri Bouillard notes, the conception of the *Dogmatics* offers a striking 'parallelism' with 'that of *Römerbrief*, which it means to go beyond'.¹²⁸ At the outset of his doctrine of reconciliation, the centre which encompasses the whole, Barth defines salvation in a clearly ontological fashion—'the consummation of being', 'being in perfection through participation in the being of God'.¹²⁹ The message is summarized thus: 'Because he *is* God, he acts in his omnipotence in order to *be* in our place and in our favour the man we *are* not.'¹³⁰ Evil is thus first conceived as a certain negation of being.

These metaphysical notions refer back to the *originary*. From whence comes evil—the *Nichtige* for Karl Barth? The Basel theologian is too concerned with scriptural fidelity either to give evil the status of a second eternal principle or to make it proceed directly from God (by virtue of a phase of the divine life, perhaps as an element of the creation). With all desirable vigour he denounces the error which makes evil into a natural *possibility* of created freedom, an error which becomes an excuse.¹³¹ And yet ... evil-nothingness cannot arise *after the fact*. It is not simply original (a result, after creation, of created freedom); it is originary, radically contemporary to created being itself. A new thought allows Barth to hold to this thesis. As he explains it, the divine *yes* which manifests the creating act necessarily contains a *no*. God 'says yes, but at the same time also says no to that which he does not approve', and this no causes to appear that which he denies.¹³² In creation with his right hand (as Luther put it) God affirms and chooses his creature, but in the same breath he rejects and repudiates the chaos or nothingness, and this rejection 'with the left hand', 'also a powerfully determining action', establishes and grounds the reality of the nothingness.¹³³

Barth suffers no hesitation in repeating this:

The nothingness is what God does not want. It exists only because God does not want it. But it does exist due to this fact. For like his desire, God's non-desire is efficacious, and from this it follows that it cannot exist without there being anything real to which it corresponds.¹³⁴

One must not confuse the nothingness with the 'dark side' of creation as it is represented in the world of Genesis by the night and the sea.¹³⁵ This side participates in the *goodness* of the creature. Yet it is the side 'turned towards the nothingness', which 'confirms the nothingness' and so signifies the menace hovering over the creature due to the fact of the nothingness. The Devil and the demons concretize, in a way, the power of the nothingness—they 'exist' even

though 'they participate neither in the being of God nor in that of the creature, celestial or terrestrial'; they are 'nothingness and so are not nothing'.¹³⁶ When creatures themselves commit evil, they succumb to the nothingness.

One discovers without difficulty the motive behind this Barthian concentration. Since the Christological concentration demands that everything be derived from the event of reconciliation, and since the covenant (of grace and salvation) is the 'internal foundation of creation', it is necessary to endow the work of the beginning with an analogous structure. In Jesus Christ, the *yes* of God, still accompanied by the *no*, is victorious; the free grace of God, still accompanied by judgment, triumphs over evil. It is only fitting that the creation, prelude and type of the reconciliation, also appear as a liberating conquest by defeating a very real adversary. One must also remember that in Barth sin is logically subsequent to the event (and to the law founded by the Gospel) by which it is abolished—just as it is with the nothingness with respect to creation. To ignore these reversals is to misunderstand Barth. For him, Jesus Christ is always primary (according, as he thinks, to Col. 1:18), even the primary transgressor in the eyes of God with respect to the judgment: 'Adam's being this man and indeed our being this man ourselves is true because of what occurred first in Jesus Christ, conforming to God's eternal decree and to the event at Golgotha.'¹³⁷ The thesis is paradoxical, but far be it from Barth to shy away from paradox!

'Jesus is conqueror'—the glory of his victory demands both the recognition of the power of the enemy and the assurance that nothing remains of it. Yet for Barth this duality is in operation from the very beginning and is compressed into the same time period. Thus he continually oscillates between a solemn or vehement denunciation of the noxiousness of the nothingness, of the gravity of evil, and the proclamation of the Good News that the irruption of the nothingness is 'completely in vain in the eyes of God', a mere 'episode', that sin is 'overtaken in advance', 'liquidated for all eternity'.¹³⁸ It is 'only a limit which moves back and is blurred, only a fleeting shadow', and 'even though it is inevitable ... it remains something completely provisional and transitory'.¹³⁹ Even in Jesus Christ himself this 'fleeting consistency' is removed; 'the permission in virtue of which the nothingness was able to be something is abrogated'.¹⁴⁰

'In regard to Jesus Christ, one can in no way say of the nothingness ... that it must remain dreaded, that it continues ... to represent a danger and to provoke disasters'.¹⁴¹

For each and every human, 'incredulity has become an objective, real, ontological impossibility' and faith has similarly become a necessity.¹⁴² All men are already justified and sanctified! This truth 'is like the fixed stars of heaven shining invariably above all the clouds produced by man'.¹⁴³ These clouds only have a frightening

efficacy when one considers humans in themselves—their deceit is a mortal danger ... And here the dialectical pendulum swings back again, even if Barth is quick to assure us that the *yes* is ultimately victorious. This is why he never goes so far as to embrace the doctrine of the *apokatastase* (the final restoration of everyone), though he does approach it and guides his disciples in that direction.¹⁴⁴

Once the origin of evil is explained and its defeat affirmed, does Barth unveil his rational conclusiveness in order to perfect the solution? After the ‘why’ will we know the ‘for what’? Barth sees the danger of the gnostic excuse and lucidly critiques the famous *felix culpa*.¹⁴⁵ But the association of the inevitable nothingness to the display of God’s free grace as such is too narrowly linked for the Barthian dialectic not to end up as well with a theodicy. One important schematic passage (often overlooked) demonstrates with what secret assurance Barth knows how to unroll the logic of God’s plan with respect to evil:

[God says yes to what he wants and no to what he doesn’t want and] destines equally the object of his love and the sign of his glory to the heart of the world he created in order to be a witness to this double intention, that is, to attest to his yes and to his desire as well as to his no and to his non-desire (...) To do this even this man *must* be, in turn, truly confronted with what God has repudiated ... But one sees right off what this confrontation with what God has repudiated, that is, with evil, *necessarily* signifies for man, who is not God and is therefore not omnipotent: it signifies that he must measure himself against a power superior to him.

This is why the victory over evil cannot have, for him, the undebatable character it has for God. This victory *must* become an event, must mark history, the history of a distress and its abolition (...) *Given the fact* that God desires man, the chosen man, he *desires* this way of doing things; in other words, he *desires* the confrontation of man with the power of evil, he wants man to struggle with it and *be pinned underneath it* since he is not God ... he thus desires to be God in such a way that man *is obliged* to live exclusively *on his grace*.¹⁴⁶

Evil was thus *necessary* that grace might return: *Quod erat demonstrandum*. Despite his caution, Barth offers a dialectical solution to the problem just as much as the Hegelians do.

Evaluation

The critique of this third type, the ‘dialectical’ type, of ‘Christian’ discourse on evil can be put more briefly than that of the preceding two. The tracts to which one objects can be seen quite clearly in the majority of the systems under review—their authors have chosen to stress as strong points what we consider weaknesses. It is significant that none of them subscribes to the orthodox doctrine of Scripture, not even Karl Barth, who is so attached to the texts.¹⁴⁷ The idea of a

real non-being (nothingness) which is something other than the corruption or perversion of the acts of a creature has no scriptural basis, a fact which disinclines one from seeing its logical obscurity (monstrosity) as being somehow profound.

Alan Richardson attributes the admiration which Tillich has excited in American readers, despite the desert-like aridity of the route taken, to the 'continual ambiguity' of his language: 'by means of a sort of hypnosis they are comforted by oases which are sometimes only mirages'!¹⁴⁸ We admire in Tillich the synthesis of a great philosophical tradition, but we also note the evident lack of any biblical concern. It is with a rather frightening serenity that he professes to 'an ecstatic or self-transcendent *naturalism*',¹⁴⁹ that he specifies in formulating his substitute for justification by faith the 'acceptance of being accepted without there being any *person* or any thing who accepts.' His spiritual family, as he well knows, is situated alongside gnosis, gnosis with all its mythologies.

Hegel's attempt represents a stronger temptation (there are Hegelians of the theological 'right'). His prowess is imposing and the will to be Christian, to wed his representations with those specifically Christian, is seductive. Yet Kojève sees clearly the anthropo-theism which results.¹⁵⁰ And Jacques Maritain comments appropriately: 'Such an absolute immanentism is more pantheistic than ordinary pantheism'.¹⁵¹ Evangelical theology must protest against the distortion which implies the confusing of the eternal trinitarian relations with creation and incarnation and of this latter with some mutation of the divine nature changed into its contrary. And what about the great find, the fusion of logic and life which is the dialectic? It seems, simply, to dry out life, to force the real through the rational mill, to even *disguise* it through the logical process. At the same time it breaks apart logic, handing it over to the arbitrary and to proof by pun.¹⁵² Maritain calls it an instrument 'perfectly designed for dogmatic hoax'.¹⁵³ The arbitrary once again resorts to identifying the negative with moral evil¹⁵⁴—in a beautiful piece of analysis, Paul Ricoeur shows that the passage from variability to tragedy under the common name of the negative 'is an optical illusion'.¹⁵⁵ And if the Hegelian proceedings are not simply regarded as harmless illusions, the effects are rather of unspeakable horror—since there is no criterion which permits one ultimately to discern good and evil in history, then all that happens is essentially God's *own doing*,¹⁵⁶ the God who is realized as the universal State! Hegel is the 'thinker of mastery' par excellence, the father of the abominations of totalitarianism—Glucksmann is certainly right on this point.¹⁵⁷

Two other criticisms deserve to be made of the Hegelian theodicy. First, one must protest against the travesty done to the notion of *pardon* in justifying crime by the progress of the Spirit, indeed in the absolute suppression of the event as such by the dialectic.¹⁵⁸ The

biblical idea of pardon, on the contrary, implies the condemnation of sin but the restoration of a personal relationship in keeping with the repentance of the sinner.¹⁵⁹ Second, one must point out that one form of evil does not make it into Hegel's gigantic recuperation project—the evil which is truly evil. This 'evil' is the conscience's objection in saying *no* to the State, in pretending to judge for itself whether to obey God rather than men—this resistance to the Spirit's movement is the unpardonable sin.¹⁶⁰ The presence of an irrecoverable residue, of a truly hated evil is in itself only a symptom of failure (one finds it in other systems; those which dissolve evil in progress, hate, as true evil, immobility and fixation, for example), but for Hegel this true evil becomes the noblest sort of courage! Even if Hegel, more than other philosophers, did draw his inspiration from the Gospel, it only goes to demonstrate the old adage: *corruptio optimi pessima*. Even if Hegel had conceived of the perfect theodicy, it would be enough to cast suspicion on all theodicies ...

To the extent that Moltmann depends on Hegel, the criticisms we just sketched out apply equally to him. Where he distances himself, the question must be asked: hasn't he borrowed in to a part of the system at least? Aren't panlogism and the work of the negative two sides of the same idea? Moltmann definitely leaves too many ideas hanging in the air or lost in the fog. Where is his God? Who was he before assimilating the nothingness?¹⁶¹ His 'panentheism'—Tillich was also attached to the term—cannot be admitted.¹⁶² Moltmann, in very moving fashion, knows how to communicate the horror of evil, but his doctrinal construction suffers from fragility and too many equivocations.¹⁶³

Karl Barth, on the other hand, proceeds from a different authority and is not an accomplice in Hegelian 'justifications'. Without implicating the entire edifice of his dogmatic one must, however, deplore his sliding towards a pseudo-rational gnosis of evil. In his thought as well, evil is metaphysically *necessary*—doesn't indignation wither away at the very thought? George Tvard, with respect to the thesis concerning demons, well notes that the 'ontological explanation' undermines the Christian view of life.¹⁶⁴ The dialectical oscillation, despite the power of Barthian oratory, ends up with a reciprocal neutralization of both proclaimed theses—Barth no longer convinces us to take the noxiousness of evil seriously, even if he does keep us from awaiting the *apokatastase* with absolute certainty. As for the explanation of the initial uprising of the evil-nothingness, what is this but academic jugglery? One tosses about words, but the idea of an 'efficacious non-desire' remains irremediably hollow. The doctrine of the evil-nothingness is a weak spot for which the Barthian construction is answerable. Perhaps it will give rise to a more global critique, one impossible to undertake here.

The dialectical solution to the problem of evil has the merit of

pointing out the Lord's ability to bend the work of the wicked to his own ends, to employ it in the service of good, an ability seen most strikingly in the supremely wicked case of the crucifixion of the Son. But with respect to the problem posed, it is a pseudo-solution, a solution even more virulent in its (evil) apologizing than those invoking universal order and the independence of freedom.

to be continued

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NOTES

- 1 Cf. our treatment of the Thomist doctrine (already outlined by Origen and defined by Augustine) in the first article, and especially the quotations from P. Sertillanges.
- 2 *Esprit et Liberté. Essai de philosophie chrétienne*, trans. from Russian, Paris, 1933, p.23. Among those whom he puts in the same category Jakob Boehme stands out as his most admired spiritual ancestor.
- 3 Title of a book, dedicated to Berdiaeff, by Matthew Spinka, 1950.
- 4 *Esprit et Liberté*, p.177.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.323.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.181. The abyss is Boehme's *Ungrund*, but Berdiaeff locates this outside God, whereas Boehme locates it in God himself (which is why Boehme and Berdiaeff are treated separately here).
- 7 C. Journet, *Le mal. Essai théologique* (Paris, 1962), p.108, mistakenly derives the word meonic from the Latin *meo*!
- 8 *Le sens de la création. Un essai de justification de l'homme*, Paris, 1955.
- 9 *Esprit et Liberté*, p.177.
- 10 C. Journet, *op. cit.*, p.107.
- 11 *Esprit et Liberté*, p.147.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.182.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Le sens de la création*, p.195.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp.195ff.
- 16 C. Werner, *Le problème du mal*, Paris, 1944.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp.62-5.
- 18 J. Baubérot, *Un christianisme profane? Royaume de Dieu, Socialisme et modernité culturelle dans le périodique "Chrétien Social" l'Avant Garde (1899-1911)*, Paris, 1978, pp.238ff.
- 19 A. Gounelle, Dieu selon la Process Theology, *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses* 55, 1980, pp.197ff.
- 20 *Process and Reality*, London, 1929, p.317.
- 21 *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, New York, 1968.
- 22 *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, Philadelphia, 1976, pp.201ff.
- 23 S.T. Davis, God the Mad Scientist, *Themelios*, 5, p.21.
- 24 C.F. Henry, The Reality and Identity of God: A Critique of Process Theology, in *Christianity Today* 13, 1969, p.582.

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- 25 S.T. Davis, op. cit., p.22.
- 26 *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, Philadelphia, 1976, p.71.
- 27 *Resistance et soumission. Lettres et notes de captivité*, Genève, 1963, p.177.
- 28 This way of putting it is devised in order to show that the divine weakness acquires its meaning from the idea of a power denied or abrogated. The antinomy does not cease being a link, which is why non-religious Christianity is not atheism.
- 29 *La représentation. Un essai de théologie après la "mort de Dieu"*, Paris, 1969.
- 30 *Le conflit des interprétations. Essais d'herméneutique*, Paris, 1969, p.297.
- 31 *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, 1967.
- 32 *Le conflit des interprétations*, pp.297ff., 422ff.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p.424.
- 34 *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, London, 1960.
- 35 Quoted by W. Post, *Concilium* 56, 1970, p.97.
- 36 F. Laplantine, *Le philosophe et la violence*, Paris, 1976.
- 37 *Le problème du mal*, Paris, 1967.
- 38 Borne naturally inclines towards a metaphysical tragedy when he admits the existence of a final conflict of moral values, with the good divided against itself, (pp.21, 92). This is why he praises suffering, not virtue.
- 39 *Fear and Trembling*, London, 1939.
- 40 *The Concept of Dread*, London, 1946.
- 41 *On Despair*, London, 1949.
- 42 *The Concept of Dread*, p.163.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p.162.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p.92.
- 45 *On Despair*, p.59.
- 46 C. Jounet, *Connaissance et inconnaissance de Dieu*, Paris, 1943.
- 47 The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, *Church Dogmatics II*, Edinburgh, 1957.
- 48 *Le philosophe et la violence*, p.197.
- 49 C. Bergot, *Résurrection* 60, Paris, 1979.
- 50 *The Problem of Pain*, London, 1943.
- 51 *The God Who is There*, London, 1968, p.103.
- 52 S.T. Davis, op. cit., p.22.
- 53 Schaeffer rightly insists on this, op. cit., p.104.
- 54 A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, New York, 1974, p.147.
- 55 F. Laplantine, op. cit., p.181.
- 56 One should add also the devaluation of authority, and a general resentment against power as such, but we cannot develop these ideas here.
- 57 J. Maritain, *De la grace et de l'humanité de Jesus*, Paris, 1967.
- 58 Of course, Renaissance humanists are not the same as their modern counterparts! Nevertheless it seems clear that Erasmus, who defended human freewill, was indeed the ancestor of modern humanism.
- 59 *Le philosophe et la violence*, p.126.
- 60 Kierkegaard's expression.
- 61 Both Kant and Kierkegaard suffer from a metaphysical antithesis which gets in the way — reason and feeling in the first instance, time and eternity in the second.
- 62 E. Bloch, *La philosophie de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1974, p.79.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p.85.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p.95.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p.86.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p.87.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p.93.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p.94.
- 69 *Systematic Theology I*, Chicago, 1951, p.235.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p.202.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p.187.

- 72 *Ibid.*, p.253; II, 20.
 73 *Ibid.*, I, p.209.
 74 *Ibid.*, p.242.
 75 *The Courage to Be*, p.46.
 76 F.D. Wilhelmson, *The Metaphysic of Love*.
 77 *The Courage to Be*, p.175.
 78 *Ibid.*, p.48.
 79 *Systematic Theology I*, pp.201ff.
 80 *Ibid.*, p.259.
 81 *Ibid.*, p.255.
 82 *Ibid.*, p.202.
 83 *The Courage to Be*, p.47.
 84 *Ibid.*, p.176.
 85 *Systematic Theology I*, p.134; *The Courage to Be*, p.181.
 86 A sign that Tillich finally abandoned any belief that Christianity is superior to the eastern religions.
 87 *Hegel*, Paris, 1968.
 88 Cf. J. Brun, *Hegel et la théologie*, *Hokhma* 1, 1976, pp.1–15.
 89 *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.
 90 A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, 1947, p.574.
 91 *Ibid.*, p.541.
 92 *Ibid.*, p.539.
 93 *Ibid.*, p.566.
 94 *Ibid.*, p.560.
 95 *Philosophy of History*, pp.100ff.
 96 *Philosophy of Right*, London, 1942, p.171.
 97 K. Papaioannou, in the introduction to the French edition, 1965.
 98 D. Dubarle, *Absolu et histoire dans la philosophie de Hegel*, in *Hegel et la théologie contemporaine*, J. Leuba and C.J. Pinto de Oliveira edd., Neuchâtel-Paris, 1977.
 99 *Philosophy of History*, p.17.
 100 *Ibid.*, p.100.
 101 F. Chatelet, op. cit., pp.43–52, has brought out the dialectic between fulfilment and denial in earlier philosophy.
 102 J. Moltmann, *Der Sinn der Arbeit*, in *Recht auf Arbeit, Sinn der Arbeit*, Munchen, 1979, p.75.
 103 Cf. J.-M. Palmier, *Hegel. Essai sur la formation du système hégélien*, Paris, 1968.
 104 J. Moltmann, *Resurrection as Hope*, in *Religion, Revolution and the Future*, New York, 1969, p.61.
 105 Quoted from G. Sauter, *Gottesoffenbarung und Wahrheitsfrage*, in *Théologie de l'Espérance II: Debats*, Paris, 1973.
 106 *Theology of Hope*, London, 1967, pp.88, 181, 182.
 107 *The Crucified God*, London, 1974, p.11.
 108 *Ibid.*, p.177.
 109 *Ibid.*, p.178.
 110 *Ibid.*, p.220.
 111 *Ibid.*, p.233.
 112 *Ibid.*, p.248.
 113 *Ibid.*, p.293.
 114 *Ibid.*, p.276.
 115 *Ibid.*, p.283.
 116 *Ibid.*, p.285.
 117 *Ibid.*, p.323.
 118 *Ibid.*, p.295.
 119 *Ibid.*, p.7.
 120 *Ibid.*, p.100.

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- 121 On this point, see his reply to E. Bloch, appended to *A Theology of Hope*.
- 122 *Théologie de l'Espérance II; Debats*, p.268.
- 123 Reply to Bloch, n.48.
- 124 *Hope in Action*, p.19. This is Hegel's doctrine of necessity.
- 125 This reversal of the dialectic is quite frequent, without faith being given as the necessary cause, cf. e.g. *The Crucified God*, p.120.
- 126 H. Bouillard, *Karl Barth, Parole de Dieu et existence humaine*, Paris, 1957.
- 127 French edition of *Church Dogmatics III*, p.1, Genève, 1963.
- 128 *Karl Barth, genèse et évolution de la théologie dialectique*, Paris, 1957, p.238.
- 129 *Dogmatics IV*, 1.
- 130 Ibid.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 Ibid., III, 3.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 Ibid.
- 136 Ibid.
- 137 Ibid., II, 2.
- 138 Ibid., IV, 1.
- 139 Ibid., III, 3.
- 140 Ibid.
- 141 Ibid.
- 142 Ibid., IV, 1.
- 143 Ibid., IV, 3.
- 144 Ibid.
- 145 Ibid., IV, 1.
- 146 Ibid., II, 2.
- 147 *Hokhma*, 11, 1979.
- 148 *Le procès de la religion*, Paris, 1967, p.51.
- 149 Reply in C.W. Kegley and R.W. Bretall edd., *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, New York, 1952, p.341.
- 150 op. cit., p.572.
- 151 *La philosophie morale, examen historique et critique des grands systèmes*, Paris, 1960, p.236.
- 152 S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, p.19.
- 153 Ibid., p.175.
- 154 Ibid., p.21.
- 155 Négativité et affirmation originaire, in *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris, 1964, p.320.
- 156 J. Maritain, op. cit., p.244.
- 157 And before him, Jean Brun who is very clear-sighted and has revealed Hegel's secret in his vast summaries of his work.
- 158 Cf. J. Maritain, op. cit., p.231 n.3, who quotes Hegel on this point.
- 159 C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira, Conclusion, *Hegel et la théologie contemporaine*, p.241.
- 160 Cf. J. Maritain, op. cit., p.207.
- 161 Cf. *Hegel et la théologie contemporaine*, p.224.
- 162 Of course, his etymology of the term would make it acceptable to orthodox opinion. But both Tillich and Moltmann see in him a rejection of theism.
- 163 An example which would be ridiculous if it were not so pathetic: *The Crucified God* is based on an interpretation of the cry 'Eli, Eli ...' which Luke himself rejects, when Moltmann considers that the quotation of Ps 22 by the Crucified One is probably a post-Easter tradition!
- 164 *Les Anges*, Paris, 1971, p.236.