

# The Problem of Evil-Enlightened?†

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## Introduction

This essay examines how the "Enlightenment" dealt with a specific theological problem. The term "Enlightenment" should be taken in a double sense: (1) It stands for an epoch of thinking in the Europe of the eighteenth century. Immanuel Kant, one of its main representatives, defined this thinking as "man's departure from his self-produced minority" and admonished his contemporaries "to use their reason without guidance of anybody else" (Answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?). (2) Besides this historical sense I shall use the term for man's claim to be autonomous in every sphere of life, a claim which recurs vehemently in the twentieth century as I believe, and not only in Europe. Living in India for some years, I realise that this claim has been virulent in my environment for centuries both in religious and in secular shape.

## 1. The Anatomy of the Ethical Question

(a) *First Level: Action*: To class an action as good or evil means to make a moral judgement, which may challenge my individual decision, but which is usually presupposed by my cultural setting and its history. We depend on such guidelines for the majority of our actions. "One knows" that burglary and murder are evil and not good.

But these judgements are historically conditioned. What was called good or evil in different cultures, races and times is not the same. These judgements depend on the basic mentality, faith, attitude of the ethical subject and his approach to life.

The more clashes or encounters of cultures, the more will your judgement on ethical issues become questionable. It is a characteristic feature of our century, both in East and West, that one can no longer

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<sup>1</sup> H. Günther, *Das Problem des Bösen in der Aufklärung*, Bern, 1974.

define good and evil, a fact which has often disastrous consequences for a culture or society.

(b) *Second Level: Man* : If we ask the question whether man himself is good or evil, the various religions will give different answers. And in fact relying on our own experience, we may not be able to give a clear-cut answer either. For we know only too well that the same individual whose goodness we enjoyed several times may be cruel or dishonest in some other instances at a time.

Is man good or evil? All the religions know that man is threatened in his deepest essence and may become both. Today's western civilisation tends to estimate man as neutral in regard to his value. He is rather the result of biological or sociological data and understood as a determinable function of pedagogical or political programmes and visions.

(c) *Third Level: The Absolute Good* : The insecurity on the first level and the uncertainty on the second led the great thinkers of all times to search for an absolute criterion for the Good. Their result may be the Good understood as an idea towards which all human struggles for virtues coincide, or the assumption of a good will which is necessarily directed towards the Good. But many religions know that no man will bring forth the absolute Good. Only God is good and nothing else must be called so (Matt. 19: 16f.).

(d) *How to relate those levels to each other?* In order to get an idea of how these levels may be distinguished and yet related to each other, let us consider the biblical story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11 and 12) :

To take the wife of somebody else and to kill the rival indirectly are deeds usually considered as being evil (first level). What kind of man is he who does it? He is the same David who used to be magnanimous towards his enemies and who seems to have a sense for justice as his indignation about Nathan's parable show. A split personality, permanently threatened by the grip of evil (second level). Due to the prophet's message David realises his guilt before God and His commandment. But God forgives him and is experienced as the Good (third level).

## 2. From Leibniz to Kant

(a) *Christian Wolff* : It was the basic idea of Christian Wolff's moral teaching to ascribe to reason man's autonomous ability to distinguish between good and evil (first level). Once man had the necessary insight and knowledge, he would be able to avoid all evil actions. Wolff was convinced that man's will was constantly directed towards the Good (second and third level).

(b) *Neology* : The basic assumption of man's high moral ability is also to be found among the so-called "Neologians," those theo-

logians who subscribed to the new trend of the enlightenment. By the upliftment of culture and education and by teaching the right virtues they hoped to heal the diseases of their time. Jesus of Nazareth became the "Galilean Socrates," the moral teacher, who taught how to go along. Sin and evil were retrenched to the realm of sensuality, and the senses were to be domesticated by will and reason.

This was the period when theologians tried to solve the problem of evil by the construction of an anthropological dualism: man's reason stood against the senses and their evil temptations. The doctrine of original sin dissolved in the moralizing acid of the enlightenment. It was the time when even New Testament scholars like W. A. Teller misunderstood the Pauline dualism of *sarx* and *pneuma* as a struggle between the rational and the sensual part of man. Genesis 3 was supposed to be a moral lesson warning us not to repeat on our part what Adam did. Since the depth of sin was no longer understood, Christ's work was not either. Jewish pictures and interpretations like the sacrificial death, atonement, redemption or reconciliation could be thrown overboard including the theological contents they try to express.

Another interesting feature of this neological period and a consequence of their shallow doctrine of sin was the fact that most of those theologians were ignorant of the gap between creator and creation. Nature and grace can now be easily identified. One becomes blind to what the Bible calls "promise." God's revelation is the unfolding of history for Lessing (God's education of mankind). Eschatology is no longer God's advent but the course of history towards its final goal. Contingency is impossible. Evil is the "not yet" which is going to disappear automatically through the historical process. Herder, too, shared the conviction, that progressing mankind will finally overcome all evils by increasing moral perfection (*Alles Böse ist ein Nichts; it is mere Übergang*).

(c) *Immanuel Kant* : Kant damped this euphoric mood of the enlightenment. At the end of the eighteenth century he questioned whether moral evil may be overcome by man's virtue. He tried to demonstrate that evil does not originate from weakness of man's will facing the temptations of our senses, but rather from a deliberate perversity. Man has got a *Hang zum Bösen*, says Kant, i.e., he is inclined from the beginning to do evil. Goethe found this idea so disgusting that he wrote to Herder about the very pity: Kant has outrageously soiled his gown with the blot of the radical evil (*er habe seinen "Philosophenmantel... freventlich mit dem Schandfleck des radikal Bösen beschlabbert"*)! Kant, however, did not stick to his insight, but suggested instead a good germ (*Keim des Guten*) in man, which may bring man to a position to fight against evil autonomously.

(d) *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* : Regarding our particular problem one could oppose Leibniz to this epoch, though standing at the

very beginning of the enlightenment. For Leibniz was able to comprehend in one what the enlightenment—following Descartes—cut asunder and what modern western philosophy desperately tries to bridge over: the relation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, between subject and object.

Leibniz had no difficulties in presupposing the *perfectio divina* and to discuss the problem of evil under this assumption (cf. his *Theodizee*). A philosophical approach, however, which makes man's reason the starting point of thinking will have to prove divine perfection and usually get lost in this attempt due to the anthropocentric presumptions.

(e) *Conclusions* : It was the essence of the European Enlightenment that man declared himself autonomous and entitled to replace any revelation by his own rationality. With an arrogant somersault he proclaimed what the Bible calls "sin" to be the fundamental truth of his existence. Hence evil diminishes to an accidental irregularity, to a curable sore in the body of mankind. Theology, too, begins to trust the serpent and pretends that man—like God—knows all about good and evil. The Neologians manage to make evil an object of their thinking, so that it can be tackled rationally and morally. Although enlightened they fail to see, however, that man alone cannot come to grips with the reality of evil, which only God is able to resist. They fail to understand evil as sin in the biblical sense and cannot but be wrecked on the problem!

### 3. The Indian Renaissance

(a) *Ram Mohan Roy* : There is no historical event or invasion which had as strong an impact on modern India as western culture and Christianity. The Bengali Brahmin Ram Mohan Roy may be said to be the first Indian who was attracted by western liberalism and the moral teaching of Jesus. It is my thesis in this essay that the mainstream of the Indian Renaissance has rejected the biblical understanding of sin up to this day. Whether this is due to the fact that the encounter took place with western Rationalism and liberal theology, where the doctrine of sin was certainly looked upon with much suspicion, or whether this refusal is due to the central Hindu heritage, we need not decide.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I tend to believe the latter. I would admit that the awareness of sin as an offence against God can be felt in the *R̥gveda*, in the ritual mistakes of the *Brāhmaṇas*, in the gnosticism of the *Upaniṣads* and in the prayerful *Bhakti* writings. But it is interesting to note that forgiveness is usually expected for unintentional misdeeds. Sin seems to be only an error, an involuntary failure of one who failed to conform to the cosmic order. Moreover the idea of *karma* tends to swallow up man's sense of personal responsibility. In such a context it is only too likely that the Christian message concerning sin and redemption loses its seriousness.

Ram Mohan Roy's stress on the "precepts of Jesus" interpreted as a moral law independent from his life and work has in fact some resemblance to the German Neologians of the eighteenth century. As in the case of the Neologians it did not appeal to the Rationalism of the Raja "to afflict an innocent man with the death of the cross, for sins committed by others."<sup>3</sup> But the Serampore missionary Marshman was surely right when he pointed to this deficiency.

(b) *Vivekananda* : While Ram Mohan Roy could interpret sin as a moral shortcoming before a personal God, Vivekananda's Vedantic Advaitism was to reject even this abridgement of Christian experience. "The Hindus do not recognise 'sin', as it is understood by the Western mind," he says. "Evil deeds are not 'sins', we are not offending some Ruler in committing these; we are simply injuring ourselves..."<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising that in pure pantheism the notion of sin becomes meaningless. Thus the Swami exclaims that "it is a sin to call man a sinner" !

But how to tackle the problem of evil? Advaitism cannot but interpret evil away. It is no last reality. "Thus all evils and wickedness are but weakness, the imperfect vision of goodness."<sup>5</sup>

(c) *Rabindranath Tagore* : Tagore tries to solve the problem on the same line: evil is understood as imperfection; not as a negation of perfection—to be precise—but as a stage leading to perfection or good. Thus evil is viewed as an impermanent aspect of our finite existence. "Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good ; it cannot stand and give battle to All."<sup>6</sup>

Hence Tagore's question is: How can evil be transformed into good? Well, if evil appears as evil only on account of a limited and shortsighted point of view, we have to change the viewpoint! The consciousness of the self has to be changed into a soul-consciousness. That means the individual has to go beyond his egoistic existence (like a chicken beyond the shell of its egg) and try to realise the universal.

(d) *Aurobindo* : It sounds like the third stanza of the same song when Sri Aurobindo assures us that evil is only the result of ignorance. Existing only by a limitation of truth, evil has no independent existence but is dependent on truth as shadow on light.<sup>7</sup> Again we are told that evil and sin<sup>8</sup> are in evolution towards the truth.

<sup>3</sup> *English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy*, Allahabad, 1906, pp. 700ff.

<sup>4</sup> *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 5th ed., Calcutta 1971, Vol. VIII, p. 15f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> R. Tagore, *Sādhanā. The Realisation of Life*, New York, 1915, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, New York, 1949, p. 535.

<sup>8</sup> Aurobindo as a matter of fact very seldom uses the word "sin" and, if so, it is used as the opposite of virtue.

(e) *Conclusions*: Though strongly influenced by Christianity the Indian Renaissance is not ready to adopt the biblical view of sin. Sin remains something unreal, a mere negation of good, due to man's weakness or ignorance. None of the above thinkers can see its root in man's will. They cannot admit that man is in revolt against God's will, in disobedience, in a wrong decision. For the Indian Renaissance, the experience of sin indicates only an incomplete movement, but not a movement in the wrong direction. Sin is only an error, so the term as such is not really fitting.<sup>9</sup>

Enlightenment is necessary as once in Europe—why not under Jesus' moral guidance? The Neologians stressed man's will and virtues; for Neo-Hindus it is true knowledge<sup>10</sup> which is sufficient to disperse the mists of evil—being a mere manifestation of *maya*—and bring man to reality.

#### 4. The Biblical Evidence

(a) *Good and evil rooted in God*: Taking the Old Testament ethos into closer perspective we do not find the proud conviction of enlightened man. There is not much of natural law or realisation of man's moral idea, but the whole thinking seems to be centred in man's relationship to God, which is supposed to be one of obedience and trust, for God is the only source of the law (Deut. 1: 17; Mic. 6: 8). Hence any ethical decision in ancient Israel is an act of obedience towards Yahweh. It is not up to man to define good and evil. The ethical norm is entirely dependent on God.

It is true, man is promised by the serpent that he will know good and evil autonomously, but this is a promise of the serpent and it turns out to be rather a curse than a blessing for man! "The knowledge of good and evil is therefore separation from God. Only against God can man know good and evil."<sup>11</sup> The good and evil man knows are not identical with God's good and evil. Man has his autonomy only at the price of estrangement from his origin.

(b) *Man wrecked on evil*: This theological insight will be confirmed by the classical prophets and can be easily verified in various New Testament passages. Whenever the prophets take up the cause of the oppressed and fight for social justice, they call upon their people to return to Yahweh. That means, they are convinced that moral and social miseries are the consequences of a perverse relation

<sup>9</sup> Terms like guilt, repentance, forgiveness etc. do not fit into this thinking either!

<sup>10</sup> *ज्ञान, वीर्य*, self-realisation, soul-consciousness etc.: of course, this is not a mere human effort, for man is divine! But this is rather a similarity than a decisive difference from the European Enlightenment, which shared a certain tendency to identify God's revelation with a part of man, namely reason.

<sup>11</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, London, 1955, p. 143.

to God. At the same time they seem to realise that man has not got the freedom to choose good or evil as he might claim. Or better—taking up the insight mentioned above, that good and evil are rooted in God—we may say: The prophets sense man's inability to do God's will. How else are we to understand Jeremiah's scolding: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23; cf. also Hos. 5:4; Jer. 6:7; 2:21; 23f.; John 8:34)? Hence a real return to Yahweh is no longer man's potentiality, but God's offer (Jer. 3:14)!

(c) *Beyond good and evil*: The insights we have gained so far by referring to the Old Testament can be verified in the New Testament. We do this by examining how the Greek term *suneidesis* (conscience) is utilized by Paul.

Paul's adoption of the term is not supporting any idea of man's autonomy—as one might expect—but on the contrary serving Paul's conviction, that our freedom is framed and rendered possible in the obedience of faith. Paul is able to appeal to his conscience only because it is fully committed to God (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12). With this theonomous conscience man is released from all wrong legality (1 Cor. 8:7-13) for a new freedom in obedience to Christ (Gal. 5:1). This obedience liberates him from the constraint to project his own morals and prepares himself to have regard for the weak conscience of his brother (1 Cor. 8:7, 10; 10:28f.).

"The voice of God and one's own voice agree, not in the sense of rational autonomy, but in that of the harmony of the I with God's will."<sup>12</sup> Here we come across this strange fact, that the moral subject man is hidden under God's will. (Christian prayer is pointing to the same secret.) The result is a peculiar uncertainty concerning good and evil: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison...?" (Matt. 25:44). Here again: God's judgement is independent from our projection of good and evil!

(d) *The law does not deliver from evil*: Considering the question of good and evil, Jesus of Nazareth did not refer to particular commandments like the scribes. He rather would ask whether man himself is good or evil. And this again does not depend on laws, but on his heart, i.e., on his relation to God (Mark 7:15-23).

Whenever Jesus is talking about the law, his actual concern is the right relation and obedience to God (Luke 17:7-10). That is why this obedience may even question the law (Mark 3:1-6). The law cannot provide the means by which man is able to protect himself against the power of evil. On the contrary, in this very attempt man may well serve evil!

<sup>12</sup> Chr. Maurer, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Michigan 1971, Vol. VII.

Man cannot deliver himself from evil. That is why Jesus even suggests not to resist evil (Matt. 5: 39). Jesus' new commandment however must not be misunderstood in a legalistic manner. The Jewish law addressed man as one who has the potentiality to avoid evil, for Jesus surely a godless and futile attempt. Law according to Jesus claims from man what he cannot possibly fulfil on his own.

Paul tries to tackle this problem in Rom. 7: 14ff. Both Jesus and Paul therefore consider man in his struggle for redemption from sin to be one who can only receive what God offers (Matt. 7:11; Gal. 5:18).

(e) *No Dualism* : In opposition to Gnostic ideas Paul's dualistic terminology does not point to two different worlds but to two different possibilities of human existence. We have seen how Neologians interpreted, for example, the terms *sarx* and *pneuma* in their framework of a struggle between senses and reason. Paul had never such an anthropological dualism in mind. His point is not a physiological division of man. To think or to act *kata sarka* does not mean to be dominated by any evil part of man, but rather to be governed by an ego, which claims to be autonomous and independent from God's *pneuma* (Gal. 5: 16ff.). The other possibility of human existence is to let God's *pneuma* become the master of my life (Rom. 8: 10; 1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 5: 18).

(f) *Agape* : Where it happens that God's *pneuma* becomes the subject of the believer other New Testament writers would probably speak of *agape* (e.g. 1 John 4: 12f., 16). By the help of God's spirit and protected by His love we will be protected against the power of evil (Rom. 8: 28). The original intention of the Old Testament law to provide a dike against the flood of evil comes to a fulfilment in this actualisation of God in the world, in this vital movement of God's *agape* inaugurated in Jesus Christ. This "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10)!

## 5. The New Enlightenment

(a) *Old claim—new answers* : The historical period of the Enlightenment is over. Yet in regard to our specific issue we observe rather just the opposite: the old claim of reason's autonomy and man's emancipation in every sphere of life is established in East and West. The attempt to define and explain the root of evil is being undertaken more than ever before: dominating sensuality, wrong socio-economic structure, suppressed libido, deviation of natural aggression are some of the given answers. "All these have elements of truth in them especially in dealing with particular evils, but what is common to them all is the rejection of the universality of self-love and the affirmation of the capacity of man and history for self-redemption."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> M. M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*, Madras, 1976, p. 197.



The endeavour to offer a short-sighted diagnosis and to proclaim the imminent conquest of all contemporary evils and diseases is going on up to this day. Even Christian theologians fail to realise evil as sin and focus only on a symptom of the real disease.

(b) *The teleological type*: Long before Darwin's theory of gradual evolution of the forms of life by means of natural selection, we can find the conception of a created order, centring upon man and moving towards a divinely appointed end. I mentioned in the second chapter Lessing and Herder, no doubt, two representatives of such a concept. Sin is usually interpreted as belonging to a stage of man's slow growth from primitive beginnings to the future earthly kingdom of God. Even physical evils can be understood as pedagogic experiences required by a developing race.

For Henry Drummond, for example, evolution is "a light revealing in the chaos of the past a perfect and growing order, giving meaning even to the confusions of the present, discovering through all the deviousness around us the paths of progress, and flashing its rays upon a coming goal. Men begin to see an undeviating ethical purpose in this material world, a tide, that from eternity has never turned, making for perfectness."<sup>14</sup>

In Germany it was Albrecht Ritschl who represented this optimistic view of history, which was supposed to become by its very nature a divine disclosure of revealing significance. This optimism was to be rudely shattered by the outbreak of the first world war, when tendencies were experienced which work against the world's order and harmony and for its destruction. With Karl Barth on the Continent and Reinhold Niebuhr in the Anglo-Saxon world theology found a new starting point.

I do not want to examine here how far European influence made Indian thinkers like Tagore, Aurobindo or Chenchiah develop a theology, in which the problem of evil is solved in a similar manner by speaking of it as a mere stage in life's growth towards perfection.<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact in spite of all differences we find even the pedagogic explanation on the Indian scene. Tagore,<sup>16</sup> for example, explains: As a child may fall again and again and the sight of it would appear cruel to us, we have to widen our perspective and integrate this evil as necessary steps towards his eventually learning to walk.

Nobody will be surprised, after all, that even P. Chenchiah—though Christian—has comparatively little to say about sin, since his Indian Theology is completely occupied by the cosmic process

<sup>14</sup> H. Drummond, *The Ascent of Man*, London, 1894, p. 436f.

<sup>15</sup> Or vice versa. It might be interesting to notice here that already Lessing was obviously influenced by the Hindu doctrine of rebirth: how else will the individual have full benefit of God's educational plan with mankind's history?!

<sup>16</sup> *Sādhanā*, p. 48.

towards a new creation. Who wonders that he "is strongly opposed to the traditional doctrine of the Fall"?<sup>17</sup>

Chenchiah's vision reminds me very much of Teilhard de Chardin's evolutive neo-humanism, in which Christian faith becomes the incentive for man's creative activity through which he might raise himself to a higher degree of perfection. Teilhard, Jesuit and palaeontologist, was honest enough to admit that on the problem of evil, "in all loyalty, I do not feel I am in a position to take a stand." That is why he left that issue "to theology, so that it may add precision and depth."<sup>18</sup>

(c) *The sociological type*: Friedrich Nietzsche thought of Christianity as the revolt of slaves (cf. his *Genealogy of Morals*). In its morality of meekness he saw the revenge which the weak took upon the strong by imposing their moral ideals and robbing the traditional virtues of the strong. Though completely different in its concern, Marxism is another kind of slave revolt. It exalts not the virtues but the estate of the lowly, and here again a dangerous transvaluation of values is going on. Evil is exclusively rooted in wrong economic structures. The question which has not yet been solved is how to eliminate the evil of social injustice without destroying what is worth preserving and without running the risk of new abuses and injustices in the place of those abolished. Since evil is identified with a mere symptom of the real disease, they cast out Satan with Beelzebul. All the brutalities in the conflict of power will be defended as a necessary by-product basic to the collective history of mankind.

Ten years back an assistant professor of theology at Marburg University explained to me that God as subject of history has to be replaced by man. Man's rational planning of the historical process has to become the substitute for the former "theology of history." "With this exchange of roles," he wrote in a book<sup>19</sup> later on, "the question of good and evil remains no longer a theological issue, but turns out to be a sociological and political one."<sup>20</sup> D. Sölle surely would agree with this sociological demythologisation.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> R. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras, 1975, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> *The Phenomenon of Man*, London, 1959, p. 313.

<sup>19</sup> "Mit diesem Rollenwechsel löst sich, was gut und böse sei, von 'Theologischem' ab und wird zum Moment des Gesellschaftlichen und Politischen." Chr. Gremmels, *Die Sünde-das Böse-die Schuld*, Radius Projekte 46, Stuttgart, 1971, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> See also Gremmels' book *Vorurteil und Utopie*, Stuttgart, 1971.

<sup>21</sup> Cf., e.g., her book *Stellvertretung*, where she suggests replacing a term like "punishment of God" by "ensemble of social conditions." *Stellvertretung. Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem Tode Gottes*, 5 ed., Stuttgart, 1968, p. 162.

Many Neomarxists, however, would try their best with Marx himself not to repeat the shallow optimism of the Enlightenment, which saw evil "only as weak and small like mere corporal defects."<sup>22</sup> Ernst Bloch and others know only too well that it is exactly the intention of evil to be minimized, overlooked or misinterpreted. Man's moral efforts will not succeed, but the dialectical process of history and the hidden tendency of matter will solve the problem, we are told. The problem remains, however: it is only postponed as in all teleological types mentioned before!

(d) *The psychological type*: Again it was Friedrich Nietzsche who interpreted man's experience of guilt as rooted in a restrained vitality.<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm, Arno Plack and others would subscribe to this basic idea. For Plack Marxism is only concerned with an "epiphenomenon of a basically wrong social order."<sup>24</sup> Enlightenment through sciences is needed to find out what actually good is.<sup>25</sup> To ask whether man is good or evil (second level) is ridiculous, "for man is judged by criteria, which are alien to his nature."<sup>26</sup> Liberation of man's natural drives and instincts is Plack's answer to our problem. For man's liberated nature will be its own regulator and develop itself towards an ethos of love. A wrong society and its wrong values are the only evils Plack is conscious of, reminding surely not only me of J. J. Rousseau, the French philosopher of the Enlightenment.

Konrad Lorenz, Zoologist and Behaviourist, is not convinced of man's nature as being centred and directed only to love. He did his research on animals' aggressions and identifies moral evil with the natural drive of human aggression, which "does not find an adequate valve in today's society."<sup>27</sup> According to Lorenz there is a very simple way to make the Christian doctrine of original sin meaningful: man must learn to govern his inherited drives and instincts,<sup>28</sup> the old story of the eighteenth century is starting anew! Erich Fromm's solution is by no means better: with Sigmund Freud he denies that conscience and moral values are metaphysical conceptions (third level). But he does not share the pessimism of his master. Fromm is rather convinced that autonomous man who is liberated from all heteronomous authorities can develop his reason until he will have dominion over nature and himself.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> E. Bloch, *Atheismus in Christentum*, Frankfurt/M, 1968, p. 230.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., his interpretation of a "bad conscience"!

<sup>24</sup> A. Plack, *Die Gesellschaft und das Böse*, 9th ed., München, 1970, p. 342f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> K. Lorenz, *Das sogenannte Böse*, 25th ed., Wien 1970, p. 326.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 335. "Man is not really evil from his youth, he is only not yet good enough for the requirements of the modern society!" (*op. cit.*, p. 333).

<sup>29</sup> E. Fromm, *Psychoanalyse und Religion*, Zürich 1966, p. 33

(e) *The positivistic type* : Let us consider a last attempt of the "New Enlightenment" to solve the problem of moral evil.

Positivism does not hesitate to replace the responsible ethical subject by a concept of rationality, which is supposed to deliver automatically the empirical conditions to avoid all kinds of evil. Ethical decisions become functionalised in order to avoid subjectivity and ideological bias.

German positivists like H. Spinner, H. Albert or K.R. Popper insisted explicitly<sup>30</sup> that they did not want to restrict themselves in their positivistic approach to empirical analysis and uniform natural processes, but to include the provision of criteria for future action. J. Habermas has rightly questioned whether being itself will provide automatically criteria for the "ought."<sup>31</sup> For M. Horkheimer and Th. W. Adorno the positivistic understanding of reality is the core of the enlightenment, which is accused of determining the process of reality like a mathematical formula.<sup>32</sup>

Behind this approach lies the naïve faith in reason, which will not be affected by any destruction or evil force, but is able to overcome all destructivity by applying the data of empirical sciences. Decisions will be made according to technical facts and necessary consequences. The ethical question has disappeared, including the problem of evil and guilt! Religion and ethics are considered to belong to a pre-scientific age.

No doubt, in positivism evil has accomplished its masterpiece of camouflage! For decades politicians of my country had to make decisions just under the compulsion of facts like "the market requires it," but a new generation is insisting on asking ethical questions again concerning exploitation of nature, pollution of water and air, disarmament etc. I am afraid Ernst Bloch is right when he says: "Evil is most powerful especially where it appears disguised and where all metaphysical questions have come to an end!"<sup>33</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

We tried to get some deeper insights about the problem of evil. I did not make an attempt to solve it! Yet I considered those attempts of others, particularly during the so-called "Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century in western Europe. I felt it was justified to include other attempts in India and the West, for I sensed some resemblance in their attempts to come to terms with this very problem.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. e.g., H. Spinner, *Theoretischer Pluralismus*, Meisenheim, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> J. Habermas in *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie*, Berlin, 1969.

<sup>32</sup> M. Horkheimer and Th. W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt/M., 1969.

<sup>33</sup> E. Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

I know that this is a daring comparison, the more so if you do not prove the actual mutual influence. Still I think as long as I dare to address people of so different a religious and cultural background with the same Gospel, I may dare as well to compare their given answers to a theological or anthropological problem, as the science of comparative religions has actually done for decades.

No doubt, we have to be conscious of our background and of our own assumptions. That is why I included a biblical chapter as my measure and criterion for the issue. Others have other assumptions, especially those "enlightened" thinkers I introduced in this essay.<sup>34</sup>

I tried to show in this essay how the old and new enlightenment in West and East fails to understand evil as sin. We have seen and described their futile attempts to solve the problem. Their attempts were futile for the following reasons :

1. They wrongly presupposed that there is one part in man—usually reason—which is not affected by evil.
2. They used to underestimate evil as a mere accident or imperfection due to man's weakness. Bonhoeffer has rediscovered for us the biblical insight, that evil appears not only where man is hampered in his development. He is "sinner" particularly in his strength and unlimited opportunities !
3. They did not really hear the Christian message where it is made clear that only through the bond with God in Jesus Christ we may escape the grip of evil. And this is a freedom which cannot be claimed, but only received ever anew.

On the other hand I never wanted to underestimate the role of reason. Ethical decisions require proper thinking and sufficient information. The Christian understanding of the universality of sin does not mean that reasoning, laws and relative choices are irrelevant! "What it points to is the fact that every good of man has the potentiality of self-righteousness in it, that every creativity of man has the spirit of destructivity inherent in it, that while man's reason and conscience reflect the imperative of truth and goodness they are also conditioned by the false purposes of the self which they serve."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Fromm, e.g., distinguishes between "authoritarian" and "humanitarian" religions; no need to tell that he prefers the latter. For God according to Fromm is only "the symbol for man's own strength," but not "a symbol for power over man." (*Psychoanalyse und Religion*, Zürich, 1966, p. 49). According to this presumption he accepts some trends in eastern religions, some O.T. prophets, some teachings of Jesus, but above all the religion of reason during the French Revolution (*ibid.*)! Genesis 3 belongs to the authoritarian type of course!

<sup>35</sup> M. M. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

The problem of evil enlightened? No ! But we have been given an answer to the problem in Jesus Christ. Surely a stumbling block for the claim of enlightenment. But assumptions have to be revised if they do not give back reality. For the serpent told us only half of the truth in order to trap us fully in our enlightened self-idolatry and self-righteousness.