

The mystery of evil

One of the great concerns of people today is the ongoing of wars in several places in the world, the increasing discrimination, division, distrust, hatred etcetera. In short: evil. These concerns are often expressed in questions like:

- Nobody wants war. Why does the law of wilderness takes the upper hand such easily?
- What is the origin of evil?
- Why does God, who in essence is love, with all his power allow evil to happen?
- Is evil an aspect of human consciousness or is it an autonomous external force, challenging us?
- Does evil have any purpose?
- Can we end evil? What can be done?

The subject of evil is one of the issues studied from a spiritual perspective by leading theosophists, amongst others. When searching for answers on these questions one comes to a broad range of approaches, from myths, spiritual traditions, personal revelation, each of which with own terminology. So, one easily gets lost or confused with these important questions, which is not always helpful. H.P. Blavatsky introduces the search as follows:

We live in an atmosphere of gloom and despair, but this is because our eyes are downcast and riveted to the earth, with all its physical and grossly material manifestations. If, instead of that, we, proceeding on our life-journey looked – not heavenward, which is but a figure of speech – but within ourselves and centred our point of observation in our inner selves, we would soon escape from the coils of the great serpent of illusion. From the cradle to the grave, our life would then become supportable and worth living, even in its worst phases.

H.P. Blavatsky, *Lucifer*, October 1887

So, while we experience the turmoil in the world, it has much to do with our own individual lives. Here, only those views are mentioned which resonated, even when, from time to time, they contradict each other. It is up to the reader to find out which views meet with his /her spiritual intuition. Understanding the nature of evil does not imply to increase its influence. In contrary, as we will see, not looking away, but gaining a deeper understanding of its origin, its energy, is the only way to end it.

Only by recognition of evil can we know good, and experience of evil is necessary to recognize it.

Annie Besant: *The spiritual life, The Use of evil*, page 112

The origin and nature of evil found in all spiritual traditions

Evil has been the immemorial problem of mankind. All religions deal with the battle between good and evil, such as Cain and Abel, Set and Osiris, Satan and Christ, Ariman and Ormuz, Azazel and Yahweh, the war in Heaven between the Gods.

In the bible this is also symbolised by the story of Adam and Eve, where God placed the tree of knowledge in front of humankind. To know, to become conscious, means to become individual, to become separate, which in turn creates opposition.

Creation start with desire, the root of evil

So, we need to start our search with creation. Theosophy indicates that before creation there was the Absolute, The One, Parabrahman, which in essence is Unity, beyond words or even our understanding. At that “level” there is no separation of good and evil. The process of creation

then starts with desire, the desire to experience, to learn, to get a deeper understanding. This desire alone creates division, contradictions, different energies, followed by the blueprints of consciousness and matter, then other aspects of creation, of which we are the final result.

Some views state that the Absolute becomes more Absolute, with the experience of the multitude of creation. That the Absolute got bored, became curious, needed multitude, creating the desire to see and experience what is. So, nothing (the Absolute) desires for something. As an Australian friend once said: “Ah, another boring beautiful day”. These remarkable observations remain an effort to understand the reasoning of creation, a mental process and therefore always limited, as it would imply that the Absolute would not be completely Absolute.

Homogeneity [undivided, One], transformed itself into heterogeneity [parts different from each other], creating naturality contrasts, hence what we call evil. [...] Neither good nor evil would exist were it not for the light they mutually throw on each other. [...] The explanation of the problem and origin of evil has nothing to do with physical laws. It belongs altogether to the spiritual part of mankind. To dabble with it superficially is, therefore, far more dangerous than to remain ignorant of it.

H.P. Blavatsky, Lucifer October 1887

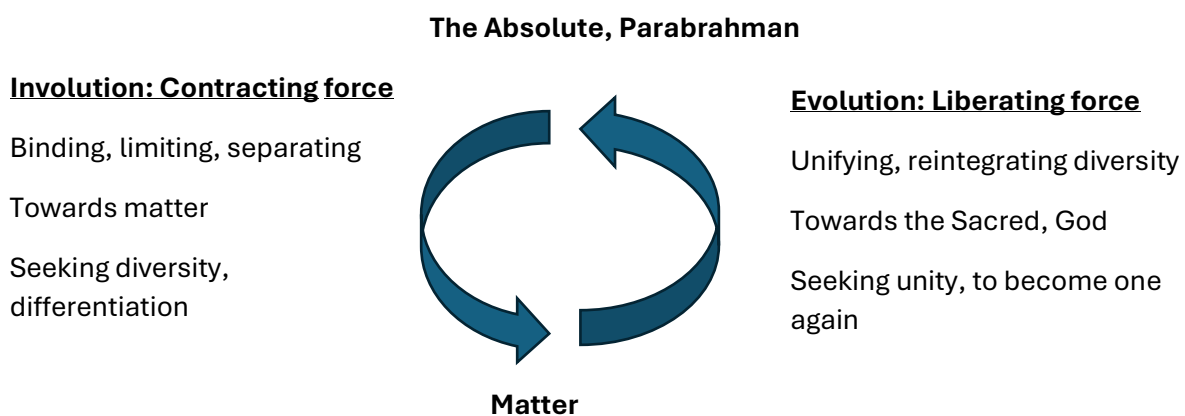
The root of evil is thus a natural result of manifestation. This process of creation has not stopped since. Creation, starting with desire, is an ongoing process, the related energies continue to be active. So, in order to see where evil takes shape, we need to go further into the process of creation.

Good and evil are relative qualities

One aspect of creation is the process of involution and evolution, from incarnating into matter to returning to the source. It represents the creative process from the first impulses from the Absolute, the creation of the Gods, the angels, and other finer energies, the mineral kingdom, the plants, animals and humankind. They all have their own role to play in this ongoing process of creation, each within in the limits of the natural laws.

Involution or incarnation has a contracting force, from finer, more subtle energies towards the material world. It is binding, limiting, separating. Evolution has a liberating force, gradually softening contact with matter, seeking unity with the Sacred.

Figure 1: Contradicting forces in involution and evolution



It is clear that good and evil are opposite forces in creation. What may be good in one situation, however, may be bad in other situations. During the process of involution, incarnation, where the spirit is increasingly being ‘bound’ in matter, this bounding, materialistic energy is

considered as 'good'. In the process of evolution, when the spirit tries to 'climb up' to its origin again, this bounding energy is considered as bad, as evil. Overall: energies which retard this process can be considered as evil.

We take as good to mean all that is working in harmony with the great Law and as evil to mean all that is working against it. [...] We call "good" everything which tends directly towards harmony, towards aggregation, towards unfolding higher unity, towards the expression of the divine Life, with ever increasing perfection. We call "evil" everything which checks that aggregation, and introduces the earlier forms into the present, everything that retards passing on to what is relatively perfect and higher.

Annie Besant, *The Spiritual life*, page 105, 106

Moreover, on the more basic level of human consciousness, the perception of evil is to some degree the result of time and culture. What may be good in one culture, may be bad in another.

Why does God not interfere? Or should angels do so?

The question, as relevant as it may seem, involves a misunderstanding of what we call God. For many, God has become what we think or hope God to be, attributing human characteristics. Such a God, however, is a man-made concept, the result of our desires.

God, as each manifestation of the Absolute, is also limited, though people have the tendency to claim that their God is the only true, omnipresent and powerful one. This human concept alone caused a lot of evil.

In addition there are finer energies, called angels in Western tradition, which can play a certain role. Their role, however is quite subtle, not to interfere, as they need to abide to the Divine Laws as well.

It is even the question whether "God" has a role to play here, to sort out problems caused by humankind. As we will see, it is crucial that we make the changes needed in the human mind ourselves. Only then we – our minds- may be open to receive beneficial inspiration. So, we cannot place this major challenge on the shoulders of a God, but face it and solve it ourselves, in our own consciousness. In other words: God and angels cannot help limited egocentric minds that hate, but, as often expressed, can only help, inspire, those who changed, who have an open mind and can in principle help themselves.

Is evil only caused by our human behaviour?

The teachers of H.P. Blavatsky expressed their ideas on evil in a letter to A.P. Sinnet.

Evil has no existence per se, and is but the absence of good and exists but for him who is made its victim, Nature [itself knows no independent cause] of goodness or malice; she follows only immutable laws [...]. The real evil proceeds from human intelligence and its origin rests entirely with reasoning man who dissociates himself from Nature. Humanity then alone is the true source of evil. Evil is the exaggeration of good, the result of human selfishness and greediness. [...] Therefore it is neither nature nor an imaginary Deity that has to be blamed, but human nature made vile by selfishness.

The Mahatma Letters to AP Sinnet, *Letter 10*, page 56 (September 1882), Barker edition, Abridged.

The letter then refers to the Buddha, on *what the Fully Enlightened one says in the 1st Khandhaka of the Mahavaga*:

"From ignorance spring the Samkharas [formations] of threefold nature—productions of body, of speech, of thought. From the samkharas springs consciousness, from consciousness spring name and form, [...], from these springs contact from this

sensation; from this springs thirst (or desire, Kama, Tanha) from thirst attachment, existence, birth, old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair. Again by the destruction of ignorance, the samkharas are destroyed [....]. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering'."

Knowing this the Blessed One uttered this solemn utterance.

"When the real nature of things becomes clear to the meditating Bikshu [Buddhist monk], then all his doubts fade away, since he has learned what is that nature and what its cause. From ignorance spring all the evils. From knowledge comes the cessation of this mass of misery [..]. and then the meditating Brahmana [explanor of sacred knowledge] stands dispelling the hosts of Mara [the tempter] like the sun that illuminates the sky."

Meditation here means the superhuman (not supernatural) qualities, or arhatship in its highest of spiritual powers.

The Mahatma Letters to AP Sinnet, Letter 10, page 57 / 58, Barker edition

Ignorance, consciousness and desire are causing evil

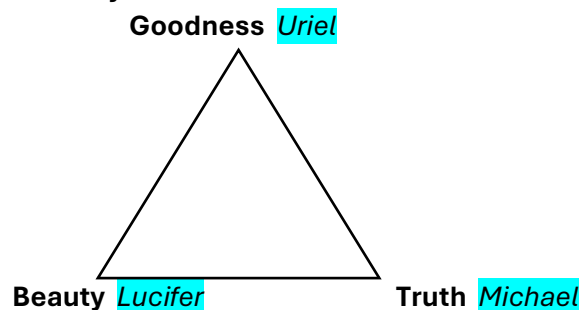
Key words here seem to be ignorance, consciousness and desire. Evil is the result of ignorance in human consciousness, desire and the related action, which leads from the one into the next. As a result they support each other in a circular process. Ending this mass of misery starts with knowledge, understanding, the destruction of ignorance. Evil only becomes active in human consciousness being the only free acting creature in nature. There is no evil in nature itself.

Does evil have an external autonomous presence?

In most spiritual traditions and myth's one can find external evil forces, which challenge us. Some myth indicate that something went wrong in creation. Then evil would be disturbing the balance in this process. This can take place on different levels, such as the battle between angels, or the influence of fallen angles. The story of Lucifer, the "fallen angel" may be useful here.

Plato and Aristotle described Truth, Beauty and Goodness as three transcendental properties, aspects of Reality and ultimate desires of Mankind. A similar trinity of qualities, working together, can be found in many traditions, on a practical note in the three fields of work in the Theosophical Society: study, meditation and service, leading to insight, right motivation and right action based on wisdom, ultimately right action when combined.

Figure 2: The trinity of complimentary forces



The same relation with truth, beauty and goodness was part of the mystic experiences of the Christian Theosophist Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). He saw that the Godhead had two kinds of will, love and grudge, a good one and an evil one. From the tension between these emerge the

major angels, with a Trinity as three most important ones, followed by seven angels of manifestation. Of these most important ones, Michael represented Truth, Auriel (or Uriel) represented Goodness, while Lucifer represented Beauty. As the story goes, Lucifer became such absorbed and blinded by his own beauty, that he wanted to be more than the God who created him, that he separated himself from the Whole, no longer acting as mediator, and thus took all related energies (angels) with him. These became an evil force on its own.

What can we learn from this story? Bringing it back to the practical experiences within the TS, where it is advised to be active in all three fields of work, study, meditation and service. These three qualities complement and strengthen each other. Study alone, for instance, creates the risk of developing a large ego, the personality, with the illusion to be much advanced. This is prevented when combined with meditation, leading to the right motivation, and service, the act of compassion, of brotherhood, making us realise the relative value of the ego, if possible with a sense of humour.

Separateness, the unfortunate and general egocentric misconception that we are separate from the Total, is a major evil in Buddhism.

"Happy is freedom from lust in this world, getting beyond all desires; the putting away of that pride which comes from the thought "I am!" This truly is the highest happiness!"
(Mahavagga, 1st Khandhaka).

One may question whether this story of Lucifer (and Satan), with its independent evil energy contradicts the view, expressed amongst others in the Mahatma letters, that humanity is the true source of evil. The fact is that energies are part of creation, good and bad, supportive and retarding, but they only "work", put into physical action, through our human consciousness. So, it is up to us whether we act as the instrument of good or evil.

Does evil have any purpose?

As clarified, evil energy is part of creation and has to play its own role.

Light would be incomprehensible without darkness to make it manifest by contrast: good would be no longer good without evil to show the priceless nature of the boon; and so personal virtue could claim no merit, unless it had passed through the furnace of temptation.

H.P. Blavatsky: *The Key to Theosophy* (p. 112)

In one of her articles, HPB explains the role of experiences in human evolution.

Spirit has to pass through the ordeal of incarnation and life, and be baptised with matter before it can reach experience and knowledge. After which only it receives the baptism of soul, of self-consciousness, and may return to its original condition of a god, plus experience, ending with omniscience. In other words, it can return to the original state of homogeneity of primordial essence only through the addition of the fruitage of karma, which alone is able to create an absolute conscious deity.

H.P. Blavatsky, Lucifer October 1887

While Annie Besant adds some of the personal questions which may emerge.

You may ask: Why this retarding force? Why should there be this action of retardation in evolution? Why should there be in evolution something which opposes? How can it come? If everything is from the One, how can it develop?

First, because the condition of any diversity is the manifestation of the opposing poles of Spirit and matter, of light and darkness. Second, for their development it is necessary for

positive qualities to be exercised against opposition. Without opposition no development is possible; without opposition no growth is possible. All growth and development result from the exercise of energy against something which opposes. Good and evil are the two forces which cooperate to liberate the soul; the one by drawing it upwards, the other by shattering everything to which it clings and which is not God.

Annie Besant: *The spiritual life, The Use of evil*, page 108, 109, 113

So, the aspect of “evil”, is unavoidable, and has to play its own role. This is also the case in our own lives. The question is therefore, how to deal with it as human beings.

The ending of evil. The choice is ours, each with its own consequences

Annie Besant points at the role we have to play in this, referring to the fact that we have to make our choices, each with its own consequences.

The choice is in your own hands. You must realise that if you choose the side which retards evolution you have chosen destruction, by identifying with the disintegrating agency. If you choose harmony with evolving life, you have chosen continuation, because you have identified with that which is the law of progress, and that identification with that law will give you the permanence which results from harmony.

You may ask: Why should identification with the retarding forces lead to destruction? The answer is that the Divine Life, going on and causing evolution, returns to unity, and everything which harmonises with its mighty course is carried onwards without waste of energy. On the other hand, everything which sets itself against evolution and causes friction and retardation, wears itself out by the very friction which it causes. It is a law of motion that a moving body continues to move if not opposed, but if friction is generated by its coming into contact with another body it will gradually come to a standstill.

Annie Besant: *The spiritual life, The Use of evil*, page 108, 109

Preliminary conclusions

As explained here, evil is a natural aspect of creation. Retarding, resisting forces continue to have a function, a role to play. It is only through human ignorance, consciousness and desire that our actions turn into what we call evil. Therefore, evil has a function for us, as a tool to transform our consciousness and desire, and therefore its energy.

First, we need to recognise how and when these energies express themselves in our individual and collective behaviour. All universal energies, as explained in figure 1, are also active in our consciousness. The contracting energies express themselves as desire to the material world, as greed, fear, hatred, aggression etcetera, which are binding and limiting us. In theosophy, this aspect of our consciousness is called *kama*. Understanding its nature and influence are crucial on the spiritual path, in order to be transformed. *Buddhi*, another aspect of our consciousness, at the other hand, creates freedom, inner liberation for our spiritual intuition, embracing all in oneness. So, entering the spiritual path, making choices based on wisdom, is a direct approach towards what we have called evil.

Understanding the nature of the energies involved may be helpful. For instance, activities based on evil run out of energy by the friction they create. This may take a while, as evil energy is strong and constantly “revitalised” by emotions and desires. When many people are absorbed by this, astral clouds are created, energy which impacts others. When, at the other hand, groups of people work together in harmony, a strong positive energy is created, which, for instance, can be experienced in old churches.

So, can we see these forces as a challenge, a call to make changes? The latter alone would make the energy of evil already a lot softer, not clouded by fear.

What can we do about evil

Cutting the root of desire is the only way it can be finally extirpated. You can only get rid of it by gradually realising through experience that gratification of all desire which is not going upwards, is a womb of pain.

What can you do when you realise the force of evil, save contradict it and place yourself in opposition to it, and yourself be true? Never let a false word escape your lips; never let a false thought find habitation in your brain, never let a false action disfigure your conduct, and the result of the recognition of falsehood will be to develop in you the necessary power for truth. As you struggle against the tendency to falseness, there is developed in you the increasing power to be true.

As you enlarge and increase your capacity for Truth by struggling against falsehood you are making your character a receptacle for the Divine Life, that Divine Life which shall flow into you in ever-increasing volume and give you greater power. Thus you are developing those qualities of Truth which, without opposition, you could never have evolved and which, in proportion to the energies evolved by your efforts against falsehood, will purify your nature from falsity, and render true the life which you are developing.

Annie Besant: *The spiritual life, The Use of evil*, page 110, 111

So, there is actually more that we can do to face evil than what we generally think, even considering the strength of it on all levels, including our own consciousness.

Actions with the desire to do good

Here several options are listed for consideration, choices to be made based on our own character. Focus on one single activity has its advantage, as focus gives clarity and strength, which, however, creates the risk of ending up with a large ego in “splendid isolation”. It is therefore suggested to get involved in several activities, if possible related to Truth, Beauty and Goodness, or study, meditation and service.

- **Study.** Referring to the observations made by the Buddha, ending this mass of suffering starts with knowledge, understanding. A step has already been made by reading this paper, getting a better understanding of evil, its origin and its impact on our lives, as a base of further study. Moreover, study, or even reading inspiring spiritual texts helps to get a deeper understanding and creates a more uplifting mindset.
- **Meditation.** There are many forms of meditation, each with their own benefits. For some it may be helpful to meditate on peace, such as the ITC Peace meditation. In line with this search it is advisable to get some understanding on J. Krishnamurti's view on meditation, as a state of awareness, a continuous learning by observing what is going on in our mind. Then we are faced, amongst others, with aspects of fear and love, the inner battlefield between these energies.
- **Service.** As we have seen, desire has been the root of evil. Through service desire is transformed to the desire to do good, changing the focus of the energy, a crucial aspect of inner transformation. It may be good to mention here that working in and for the TS is an excellent environment, as all the issues discussed here are part of its culture. All activities in the TS are aimed to help mankind by cultivating an ever-deepening

understanding and realization of the Ageless Wisdom, spiritual self-transformation, and the unity of all life.

- **Join physical meetings** aimed at a harmonious peaceful life, with a deeper understanding of the challenges we are facing, such as TS lodges. It is said that when you read something, thoughts enter your consciousness through thought, but when you hear something it is easier to enter through your heart.
- **Ceremonial work.** For those who feel related to ceremonial work, joining ceremonies in churches or other ceremonial organisations, can support creating positive energies.
- **Watch a video** with excerpts of Krishnamurti teachings on conflict, such as:
<https://www.kfa.org/teaching/on-conflict/>

Sources:

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