

Evil in the Domain of Dialogue

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I. EVIL IN THE DOMAIN OF DIALOGUE

The literary equivalent of the situation I will attempt to throw light upon through the phenomenological method is one of the scenes from Shakespeare’s drama *Richard III*. Lady Anne meets Gloucester, whom she sees as the personification of all evil (and ugliness). He is, in addition, the murderer of her husband and of his father Henry VI. It would be difficult to imagine a greater opposition. There is no doubt Gloucester is *the incarnation of evil*. At the sight of him, Anne blurts out, “Foul devil, for God’s sake, hence, and trouble us not,” and then adds, “Either heaven with lightning strike the murderer dead, / Or earth, gape open wide and eat him quick, / As thou dost swallow up this good king’s blood / Which his hell-govern’d arm hath butchered!”¹

¹ W. Shakespeare, *Richard III*, I.2, 50–54; 64–66.

To flee is to distance oneself, or to put someone else at a distance. Anne flees. She did not seek out this encounter while following the coffin of the murdered king; Gloucester himself got in her way. Now she wants to distance the murderer from herself. Here we distinguish two different forms of flight of man from man — flight from the *sight* of another and flight as the severing of *dialogical ties* with the other. Which of the two is a flight from evil in the strictest sense? Before we pose this question and attempt to answer it, we need to address an anterior issue: What does it mean to flee from the sight of another, and what does it mean to sever dialogical ties with the other?

The Flight of Man from Man

We will first take a look at the instance of flight from the sight of another and then flight as the severing of dialogical ties.

Flight from the sight of another seems to express itself in the phrase, “I don’t want to know you, I don’t want to hear about you, and I don’t want to see you.” Flight from the sight of another presupposes the existence of an intentional relation between two people. The other person is *there* while I am *here*; there is a distance between us, which does not, however, rule out some form, or some degree, of intuition [*Anschauung*]. I see a person, hear him, recall and imagine him to myself, in other words—I *have* someone within the scope of object-directed acts of consciousness. Escape from the sight of another begins with a “get out”: get out of my sight, get out of my memory or imagination. Here to flee means the following: to distance oneself or to distance another beyond the reach of intentional experience, *to cast someone beyond* the reach of the surrounding world. Can such a flight succeed? I will not resolve this question, but the attempt to flee in this way is enough for our present considerations.

Flight as the breaking of the bonds of dialogue is more radical and touches upon deeper levels of the soul. We say, “I don’t want to have anything to do with you.” And we want the other person to stop querying us and not to expect any answers from us. “Don’t talk to me, I am not saying anything to you, nor will I.” Why? Because there either is no relation between us or it has ceased, that is, there is no basis for the exchange of words. It is difficult to describe more closely the dynamics that underlie such a relationship. Its character and *quality* shows itself only in the breakdown of dialogue. One thing is certain: this is not an intentional relation, but a dialogical relation, where a human being is not an object of experience, but a participant in a dialogue. The existence of a dialogical relation is revealed by the first speech act between two people. This act is usually a question and a response. The question points in two main directions: *What do you think about it?* The words *about it* (sometimes *about him*, i.e., a third party) express an intentional relation, whereas the words *what do you* indicate a dialogical relation. The latter is not objectifying. The other

person given in the horizon of the dialogical relation is a subject, not an object; he is a subject for whom there can be objects. The dialogical relation predates words and conventions of dialogue. It is an openness toward the other, a readiness to listen and speak. Such a readiness is the condition for dialogue. Whoever flees from another person, breaking the bonds of dialogue, strives to radically seal himself off from the other. 113

These two varieties of flight are usually interconnected. One cannot flee without breaking the bonds of dialogue and one cannot break the bonds of dialogue without distancing the image of the other beyond the *boundaries of visibility*. Flight does not preclude a form of longing for whomever we are trying to escape. The painful remembrance of another person awakens in us not only the desire for severance, but also the desire for another, better, encounter with him. Those in flight erase the image of the other, but they pine for dialogue; they break the bonds of dialogue, but they pine for the image. The very concept of the flight hides a paradox: as long as I flee, I see the shadow of the other next to me. Thus, in fleeing I involuntarily return.

The two varieties of flight of man from man reveal to us the two basic forms of human relations: those toward the environment are unlike those toward people understood as dialogue partners. The experience of the flight throws into sharper relief the difference between an intentional relation and a dialogical relation. These relations cannot be reduced to each other. However, nor are they mutually exclusive. To be more precise: the dialogical relation can overlap with the intentional relation and vice-versa (one can look and talk), none of which means that one type of relation must swallow up the other. To better foreground the differences between them, we will once again use the dramatic metaphors which we utilized in earlier chapters.

The world of the human drama as such is primarily the reality of the stage. The stage is the scene of dramatic action. The stage is composed of things, objects, landscapes, and other human beings, who are made present through intentional experiences. The stage is a place of possible movement. When I move across the stage I must consider the obstacles that lie upon it: I have to avoid a puddle, a fallen tree upon a road, another person coming at me, and so on. I am tied to the stage upon which my drama unfolds exclusively through an intentional relation, or one that can become exclusively intentional. I know that I can aim various intentional acts toward the stage, even though I am not presently doing so. This relation is ruled a priori by the category of space. The objects, things, and people are always somewhere, somehow tied to places where they remain motionless, or to some degree moving through them. The objects and people located in space are ruled by the principle of one-next-to-the-other. As such, it is impossible for two bodies to simultaneously occupy exactly the same place. In the intentional consciousness directed at another person, a consciousness that objectifies man, the experience of his body is of particular significance. Upon the spatial stage *spatial* humans live, move

114 and die. These people are initially only presented as *objects* — just like things — to the external gaze through the mediation of the harmonious interplay of their appearances. Husserl has pointed this out. The fundamental rule of this experience is the rule of distance: *me here, you there*. As a result of the intentional experiences of a person his *sight* is made firm, as the *sight* of a constitutive element of the general landscape of the world. Man is a part of this landscape. When this human disappears from one's gaze then the memory of the landscape where we used to see him will remind us of him. The lack of a person among things where he used to spend time creates the impression of *an empty stage*.

But the world of the human drama is also something more: it is constantly developing, multidimensional, variegated, and conflict-filled dramatic elements and plots, tied to others — all part of a lifelong dialogue of a person with others, in its broadest definition. This relation of man to man is not intentional, it is dialogical. The other person is not the object of acts of perception, but is the *Thou* of a present or potential conversation. The category of space no longer plays the leading role here. Its place is taken over by the category of time. This rules the exchange of words, the exchange of thoughts. Words and utterances must occur one after another if there is to be an exchange of words, if human speech is to become a conversation. Here the other person is not part of the spatial landscape, instead he is an integral part of historical time — he is an *existence*, who leaves a past behind and has a future ahead of him. Man is a character in a drama. Man joins man through the mediation of dialogue, in which questions and answers play a crucial role. I ask and I expect an answer. I listen to the questions I am given and I provide answers. Between the moment of the answer and the moment of the question a moment of apprehension elapses in which an experience of particular responsibility forms itself: the consciousness that I, as the questioned, *should* give the other an answer. This experience demands a deeper explanation. For now let it suffice to say that nothing like it is constituted in being among things (rocks, trees, everyday objects), but with beings who are capable of conversation, that is, above all, with people. The experience of responsibility also does not have a strictly intentional character. Intentional acts are object-directed; for example, the act of questioning is directed toward whatever it is we are asking about. What we are asking about is given to us as an object. On the other hand, the person we ask is not an object, he is a participant in a dialogue. I am tied to the participant of a dialogue in a non-objectifying relation of *responsibility*. He is the basis and beginning of mutual participation in a dramatic engagement, which reveals itself as more or less mutual with the passage of time.

Buber pointed out the difference between the intentional relation to the world-stage and the dialogical relation toward a human *Thou* back when he was either directly, or perhaps indirectly, polemicizing with

Husserl's theory of intentionality. Michael Theunissen wrote about the antagonism between the two manners of thinking and the attendant difficulties in his *Der Andere*. Without going into the particulars of this debate, we can make certain distinctions. The analyses of the apprehension of the other person that Husserl left behind were, in the main, devoted to the intentional experience of the other, thereby being treated as if he were part of the stage. The analyses inspired by Buber and the rest of the Philosophy of Dialogue were, above all, analyses of the I-Thou relation. Both of these approaches explore the experience of the other person, but the manner in which these analyses are conducted are radically different, and so are their results. We shall return to this later. Here we begin to see the outlines of a very important problem: What is the relationship of the dialogical openness to intentional experiences directed toward the other person? Which is more primary? Which is the condition for the other?

We shall return to the problem of flight. We can now somewhat better understand the difference between flight from the sight of someone and flight that leads to breaking the bonds of dialogue. In fleeing the image of the other, we desire to change the stage. We do not want the *evil person* to appear upon our stage. The sight of him pains our eyes, deforms the landscapes around us, and is an obstacle to our movements upon the stage. By breaking the bonds of dialogue we want to deny all trace of experiencing a link, all trace of *respons-ibility*. We do not want to ask. We do not want to give answers. We want to take part in neither a factual nor a possible conversation. And yet both flights have one and the same source: the conviction that the other person is *evil* in some sense. This conviction — the conviction about the *evilness* of the other person — prompts the flight reflex and the attempt to erase all traces of presence.

But, as I have already stated, flight conceals a kind of paradox: in fleeing I simultaneously confirm a presence. The louder I speak of the need to take leave, the more I confirm that the other is there. The exiles return — they return in dreams, in fantasies, in a remembrance. This is why we can say that a flight is simultaneously an opening of horizons for successive encounters. The evil that threatens also presents itself as a temptation.

This leads us to a question: Which dimension, the intentional or the dialogical, is where evil appears? The answer does not seem difficult: evil in its broadest definition can come toward us both from the stage, or from another person. However, let us clarify that we are talking about evil in the broadest definition. We say this because we still need to make the concept of evil more rigorous. The evil which comes to us from the stage is different from that which comes from people. The evil that threatens us from the stage has an ontological character, while the one which comes from the other person is ethical, or perhaps even metaphysical. We will now turn to explaining these distinctions.

The ontological interpretation of evil understands it as a lack that appears in a being of some sort. Let us take a closer look at the phenomenon of a threat. How does ontological evil pose a threat to man? It threatens to deprive him of a property he either possesses or one that is within reach. In other words: it threatens him with the lack of something. To be exposed to ontological evil is to be exposed to a deprivation. The home that I own can go up in flames, I can lose my health, or even my life. What does this mean? It means that the ontological interpretation of evil essentially depends upon a substitution of the concept of evil with the concept of imperfection. For ontology, evil is equivalent to the imperfection of created beings. Imperfection does not exist independently, but only insofar as there is a being in which a perfection should come to exist. This leads to a phenomenologically paradoxical thesis: evil as such does not exist and the non-existence of what should come into being is evil.

Two problems are especially important here: What is the scope of the ontological interpretation of evil? And does this interpretation take into account the whole experience of evil?

It seems, above all, that the ontological interpretation of evil neither does, nor can go beyond an intentional/objectifying consciousness of the world. It is essentially derived from the experiences of the *stage* and is adapted to those experiences. It assumes that we have an object-directed consciousness of things and people (including ourselves) as beings composed of many qualities. These beings truly exist. Here evil is understood as that which should come into being in what already exists. Existence is implicitly acknowledged as the fundamental good, which cannot be questioned as such. On the other hand, evil is on the side of the non-existent. The intentional consciousness of the world presents people and things to us within the horizon of existence. The horizon of existence is the horizon of the good. To desire the good is always, in the final analysis, to want the existence of something. To be exposed to evil is to be exposed to a potential loss. Upon the world-stage there are powers capable of depriving me of what I have and what I should have. So then, what exactly is that most fundamental quality of which I could be deprived? It is my existence, my life. Death is the evil of all evils in the ontological interpretation. Death is the archetype of the ontological philosophy of evil. It is the end of life, given in the mode of an intentional representation. I see the world and I strive to represent myself as absent from it. The ontology of lack derives its main principle from attempts at such representation.

The temporal inception of imperfection, that is, the moment when some more or less fulfilled being, some more or less finished whole, is deprived of its proper perfection, is a moment of misfortune. Misfortune is the moment when imperfection enters the world and remains within it as a lack. There are many causes of misfortunes; another person and even I myself can be its cause. The misfortunes caused by the violence

of the world are usually acknowledged as chance accidents. Chance accidents are events that occur outside the teleological thrust of things. Lightning striking a house, a flood, an earthquake, etc. are all misfortunes. Actually, from the scientific point of view, none of these events are accidents, but the point of view of science is not the perspective of the person struck down by misfortune, a person who knows these things are *disastrous accidents*. Misfortunes are inscrutable powers of the world-stage that question man's most basic project of living in this world. Man weaves a peaceful and quiet life upon the stage of the world, and then at a given moment the stage revolts against his presence; the joyful certainty of having possession of the world instantaneously disappears. Misfortune speaks to man with a twofold *negation*: you did not anticipate and you did not control. In this way misfortune makes man aware that he is a finite being. 117

How does evil in the strictest sense differ from misfortune? Evil appears upon a different level than misfortune. The proper location of evil is the dialogical I-Thou relation, not the intentional man/world-stage relation. This statement is crucial for our exploration of the problem of evil.

Let us return to the scene from Shakespeare's play before we attempt to flesh out the difference we are sketching out. Gloucester attempts to convince Anne of the real source of his crime and thus attempts to prove his innocence. What he says is meant to prove that his crimes are not an evil deed, but a misfortune. Gloucester explains that he loves Anne. His love is like a storm, a flood, an earthquake. Anne's husband stood in the way of this love as a *chance obstacle*. This is one of the first misfortunes. Gloucester has actually killed, but Anne cannot blame him for it. Was it not her beauty that drove him to insanity? Gloucester attempts to veil the essence of evil by suggesting his misfortune.

Now let us turn to the distinctions we have introduced.

Dialogical Evil

Our examination continues of the general topic of the threat. I have already mentioned the ambiguous situation man is thrown into when he is threatened by something. Threat is expressed in the conditional form, "If you do deed X, you can expect good Y, but if you do not fulfill this deed, then you will not attain good Y, and you will encounter evil Z." The words "deed X" should be understood as broadly as possible — that is, they should include the renunciation of something. "If you do not pick the forbidden fruit, then you can expect good X, but if you pick it, then evil Z awaits you." The deed-renunciation X is ambiguous, it is questionable. Eve looks at the fruit and sees it to be beautiful and delicious. The evil of the deed is not as evident as the beauty and the taste of the fruit. The tempter takes advantage of this and says, "You truly shall be like God." Evil not only threatens, it also promises. Evil enters between people and exploits the ambiguity of objects

118 and events — an ambiguity that emerges from the very existence of different perspectives on one and the same thing.

We will once again attempt to rule out ontology. Looking at *the fruit as such*, Eve sees no evil in it. In other words, an ontological consideration of the structure of the world as a stage detects no evil in it. St. Augustine exploits this fact in his polemics with the Manicheans: “For all things in proportion as they are better measured, formed, and ordered, are assuredly good in a higher degree; but in proportion as they are measured, formed, and ordered in an inferior degree, are they the less good. These three things, therefore, measure, form, and order — not to speak of innumerable other things that are shown to pertain to these three — these three things, therefore, measure, form, order, are as it were generic goods in things made by God whether in spirit or in body.”² When does the fruit of good and evil unveil its evilness? Only when it becomes the subject of a dialogue between man and man, man and God, and man and the tempter.

Evil is not a thing-in-itself (to speak in general terms and to borrow from a non-biblical vocabulary); rather, it should be categorized as a phenomenon. Evil is something that *appears* [zjawia się], rather than something that exists. However, it is a very specific phenomenon. It cannot be thought without a moment of falsehood. Evil is not a phenomenon conceived as an accurate manifestation of things hidden behind it; evil does in fact reveal something, but it does not show us the truth of things. And yet, it is not a total delusion behind which lies an utter void and nothing more. The ambiguity of the fruit of paradise reveals both a truth and a falsehood about man, God, the tempter, and the thing itself. The phenomenon of evil is situated somewhere at the intersection between delusion and manifestation. As a delusion, evil has a *foolishness* within it, but as a manifestation it has a *threat* within it. What, then, is this unique phenomenon of evil? It seems that the specifics of the phenomenon of evil are well rendered by the Polish word “zjawa” [apparition]. Evil is a *zjawa*, an *evil zjawa*, though the adjective only analytically expresses what is already hidden within the concept of *zjawa* itself. The *zjawa* simultaneously lies and tells the truth, it threatens and seduces, takes away one hope in order to resurrect another. The reality of the *zjawa* is not a reality of being, nor the reality of the lack of being. The *zjawa* is an *interreality*, which is born *between* people as the fruit of mutual dialogical structures.

We will look deeper into the structure of the *zjawa* only by considering the aspect of the threat.

The threat puts man face to face with a future evil. Time is the fundamental condition for the possibility of a threat, or more precisely, the temporal future. A threat is threatening for a person who experiences the flow of time. The threat shuts off, to a certain degree, a person’s future. Space also plays a substantial role here. The evil contained within a threat comes to man from the outside, from the surrounding space, which is already

² Augustine, “On the Nature of Good,” in: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, ed. P. Schaff, Cosimo Classics 2007, p. 352.

peopled. The threat introduces a kind of division in a person — it divides his personality into a more intensely *external* part (which concentrates upon its very own self in fear and trembling) and a more intensely *internal* part (which is most exposed to the touch of evil). The imagination is yet another highly important component of the *zjawą*. The threat awakens fear and dread — primarily through awakening the imagination. Without the imagination the threat would not be so imposing. Imagined evil has “something uncanny” about it. It frightens with a mysterious power, it frightens with cunning and deception. It forces a person to acknowledge his weakness before the close struggle even begins.

The *zjawą* is undoubtedly conditioned by the ontology of the stage. It emerges as the boundary of future time, a time which bears fruit in various designs in the heights and depths of the stage. The time of the stage is conditioned by space. This is why the threat can manifest itself as a stumbling block. We sometimes say, “I was dumbstruck by this threat.” The knees of a person who has been “dumbstruck” go “weak.” He is “rooted to the floor.” In this way the *zjawą* questions the project of man’s being in the world. In the final analysis it strives to deprive man of his place upon the stage of the world. The person touched by a threat becomes an “exile.” The “Holy Land” will no longer hold him. The stage which once was obedient and calm now rebels.

Despite all of these conditions, the interpersonal space of dialogue is the essential source of the *zjawą*. The stage of the world is where various projects of many different people and communities intersect. *Zjawy* come into being somewhere at the intersections of these projects. Adam and Eve’s project of being, the project of God likened to man, and the project of the mysterious tempter force themselves on the fruit of paradise. The fruit truly is beautiful and good, but because of the intersection of many projects it begins to be something more than it is; it comes to mean more and say more. In this way it begins a chain of evil, as a chain of evil events. The fruit is a possession of God. Eve’s project turns it into a possession of humanity. The change in its meaning becomes possible because of the deception introduced by the tempter.

The actual foundation of the *zjawą* is the fruit — the forbidden fruit. When we look at the situation from the outside we see how the sources of the *zjawą* are competing projects to take possession. Who owns the fruit? The fruit is part of the stage. Man is convinced that the whole stage is in his possession, while God has reserved some fragment of it for himself. This gives rise to the ambiguous meaning of the fruit. The fruit promises happiness and misfortune at the same time. But is it really only a matter of two different projects to possess? Does the conflict revolve exclusively around possession? Is everything to be resolved in terms of the commandment not to steal? Certainly not. The foundations of the project to possess conceal something else.

The conflicting projects to possess presuppose not only the negation of the right to own, but also the negation of the right to exist. The position

120 of “you have no right to own” leads to the position of “you have no right to be.” The principle of “thou shalt not steal” dovetails into the principle of “thou shalt not kill.” From the perspective of this shift, theft becomes a form of killing. Both principles point us toward the real heart of the matter, but they do not reveal it. To kill means to deprive someone first and foremost of the right to exist. God says, “If you eat the fruit, you will deprive yourselves of the right to exist.” The snake says, “If you eat the fruit, you will be like God.” The man who reaches for the divine denies God of the right to be divine. The debate revolves around axiology understood most profoundly, that is, around the principles of agathology. The project to possess presupposes the possibility of the project of being, as its condition. The project of being means not only the project of how to be, but primarily the attempt *to be*, that is, to exist in a just existence. All evil, in the final analysis, is an indicator that the man touched by it has an unjustified existence. He is, but he has no right to exist. All the good which affects man is a symbol of the fact that a man exists in a just existence. This demonstrates that existence itself is a problem for man. It is a problem because it can be an existence of good as well as an existence of evil. Scheler said that the existence of negative values is a negative value. He also claimed that the existence of a positive value is a positive value. The existence of evil is evil. Only the existence of the good is good. Man has a problem with his own existence because he desires it to be the existence of good.

None of this settles the matter. One of the primary tasks of the threat (much like temptation) is to incline a person to acknowledge and to accept evil as his own. The threat is a form of persuasion whose main argument is fear. The *zjawa*, above all, frightens. It frightens using something beyond the fruit, something which might happen, something which might occur. The *zjawa* speaks in man’s own voice. It says the following: “The fruit is beautiful and delicious, while evil is only an appearance, it is so insignificant that it pales in comparison with a future good.” The *zjawa* destroys one hope, but it awakens another. It operates within the realm of hope. It reduces the significance of the future to come. Why? So that man will pick the fruit himself. If man did not do it himself, if the wind were, for example, to knock the fruit off the tree, then it would be a misfortune at worst, but there would be no evil. Evil needs man in order to occur. It occurs through the hands and feet of man. Let us note: misfortune destroys as violence, whereas evil destroys through persuasion. It has no power to destroy man if man does not destroy himself. This is why evil is not only a trial for reason, but also a trial of the will. Here the *zjawa* reveals itself as simultaneously powerful and helpless. It is helpless because in itself the *zjawa* cannot do anything. But also powerful, because it can utilize the power dormant within a man and incline him, against his own self, to destroy himself.

The most significant achievement of these studies is the insight it affords us into evil as a *zjawa*. Evil is not a being, nor is it a non-being, instead it belongs to the category of phenomena — it is an apparition. As a science of phenomena, phenomenology is especially suited to study the nature of evil as a *zjawa*. The apparition of evil reveals itself in the form of the threat and temptation. So far we have analyzed only the threat.

The *zjawa* comes into being in the dialogical I-Thou space and not in the bosom of the intentional dimension between man and the stage. Various projects to possess condition the possibility of the *zjawa*. In turn, the conditions of possibility for the various projects to possess are projects either to acknowledge or to deny another person's right to exist. Ultimately, a threat is always a denial of the right to exist. One who threatens says, "You are evil and you have no right to exist." One who is threatened defends not only the brute fact of existence, but also its goodness. We do not know precisely what evil is, nor what good is, but we do know one thing: evil causes a man to become an unjustified existence, while good causes him to exist in a justified existence. Good and evil constitute the true *meta-physics* of human existence, they are *meta-ta-physica* proper.

An introduction to the phenomenology of evil shows itself to be indispensable for man's understanding of the specific experience of man — an experience in which another person turns out to be a carrier of evil, whereas I, when I encounter him, can neither flee from him, nor approach him. Living on the verge of encounter and departure, one can better see what they truly are, what reveals itself as impossible: pure encounter and pure departure.