Tahir Rashid

The London School of Economics and Political Science

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 86 067 words.

Contents

Abstract

For many people the concept and indeed utterance of the word ‘evil’ has a common-sense intelligibility. This is usually identified with an outdated worldview signified by the religious. Evil is therefore interpreted as a supernatural or spiritual force that causes suffering and is responsible for making the world unintelligible. What I hope to show during the course of this thesis is the intelligibility and meaning of evil is neither uncontested nor stable and has in fact undergone significant intellectual transformations. That is the intelligibility of evil is shaped as much by the experience of evil as the concepts and ideas we use to make evil intelligible. In this regard, evil in a secular age is also tied to the secularisation of evil that enunciates the intelligibility of evil through the absence of God. The secular age enshrines an expectation that evil can be comprehended naturalistically and anthropocentrically. Firstly, evil is intelligible through the utilisation of concepts derived through reason and experience. And secondly, the main agent for evil are human beings and as such is comprehensible through understanding moral freedom. However, recent criticism of the secularisation narrative and the philosophy of secularism more generally, also raises questions over the extent of secularisation of evil that is possible. Therefore, we are also interested in whether the division of reality into ‘religion’ and ‘secular’ leaves us short when trying to comprehend evil. In particular whether a purely secular conceptualisation of evil is one that always draws upon the religious to comprehend evil.

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Introducing Evil in A Secular Age

Most of us have an intuitive and even fixed sense of what evil is, or what evil means. There is a rich stock of images, ideas, names, events, persons and memories that have been internalised into European intellectual culture to signify evil. Perhaps, the most indelible source for evil is religion, and through it, we have been "blessed" with 'satan,' the 'demonic,' 'sinfulness,' and 'pride' as opponents of human beings, tempting us to do evil. Modern cinema and television, *via* religion and literature, has consolidated and secularised this understanding of evil bequeathed by religion. Think of Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings or the Harry Potter movie franchises, with their dichotomising use of 'good and evil' supervillains or roaming shapeshifting malevolent spirits, or the overriding emphasis on human suffering. The scope and varieties of evil in modern culture is undeniable.

The aim of this thesis is not to challenge these judgements, but to show that very often what evil 'is' or its 'nature' is essentialised by the dominant intellectual culture. That is, what evil 'means' or what evil 'is' can mistakenly be taken as a 'universal' phenomenon that has a transhistorical essence, that exists outside and above the historical and social conditions that produced such an understanding. To be clear, this is not to suggest that the pain of losing a loved one, or the suffering caused in war, are not universal experiences. But rather, how we express these feelings, how we conceptualise them, how we theorise them and how we comprehend them, takes place in forms that are not universal, but instead, shaped by language and history. That is, although evil 'exists' as an action, a person, an ideology, a trauma or an event; what we describe or denote as evil is immersed by the culture and society we live within and whose 'time-boundedness' is influenced by historical and cultural conditions.

One result of this, is that what evil means as an ontological reality can be bracketed and distinguished from historically specific understandings of evil and the intellectual discourses that reflect upon it. The discourse of evil is understood as the historical vicissitudes of the

European understanding of evil. There is a lot of excellent epistemological and ontological analysis of what evil is or what the basic nature of evil is? This is not what we are specifically interested in, and to the extent that we slip into explaining what evil is, it is an attempt to comprehend Christian or later secular Europe's attempt to explain what evil meant at that historical juncture. Therefore, we want to avoid the sense in which evil is perennial and exists unchanged over time. It may be for some people and intellectuals that evil is *sui generis* and that is perfectly acceptable, however, this is not what we are intent on exploring here. Furthermore, the analysis of evil as a discourse, that is an investigation into the history of Christian and European understanding of evil, and the transformation of this understanding, doesn't automatically entail that we have to be neutral about the path this understanding has taken. The narrative being enunciated in this thesis has an admiration for pre-secular understanding of evil that achieved a balance between metaphysics, religion, theology, morality, nature and politics. This more encompassing understanding of evil was subsequently lost by the reformation and reframed by modernity inside of the 'religious' and 'secular' binary. Furthermore, in our contemporary period, the secularisation of evil has taken a more radical direction towards eliminating the concept of evil itself, because it is too 'mythological' or too 'supernatural', both of which are bywords for the religious. I am unconvinced by the direction this contemporary discourse of evil has taken because secularisation to my understanding is always mired by the illusion of freeing itself from religious conceptions that it defines itself against. But the secular, particularly in modernity has historically 'made' religion or defined what religion is, and therefore any 'purely' secular understanding of evil is going to derive from an understanding of religion it defines itself against.

In sum, I will focus exclusively on the discourse of evil, the problems or questions we associate with evil, are exclusive to an intellectual culture of Western Christianity and Europe's secular modernity. It is of course worth remembering that neither Christianity nor secular

modernity are monolithic or composite entities. They are in fact expressed by contested denominations and ideological formations. Furthermore, we are not interested in presenting a theodicy that seeks to justify suffering, by giving reasons for the existence of worldly evil. Theodicy is one of the discourses produced by modernity which seeks to justify evil, relative to God, or History. Additionally, this work is also not trying to develop a secular theory of evil or indeed defend a secular concept of evil. This is another discourse that to my understanding has been produced in response to the contemporary resurgence of religion. Rather, we want to make sense of this discourse and show its significance for comprehending evil.

'Religion' and the 'Secular'

What I will show in the course of this thesis is that the intellectual discourse of evil in Europe has to be thought of through the inter-relationship between the categories of *religion* and the *secular*. To be clear we are making use of the categories of 'religion' and the 'secular' (*explanans*) in order to explain the modern discourse of evil (*explanadum*). It is the formation of the categories or religion and the secular as natural and naturally opposed to one another that has been essential to how we understand and try to conceptualise evil in a supposedly secular age. What I hope to argue throughout this thesis is the intellectual and political significance of these categories (which begins to emerge with the reformation and the enlightenment) in making sense of reality in general and this includes the reality of evil or the incomprehensibility of suffering.

The significance of these categories in shaping what we mean by evil and shaping our assumptions about evil has tended to go under the radar. One sense of grasping this is the stark choice of either interpreting evil according to the language of religious metaphysics or secular humanism/naturalism. Evil, therefore, is either something that is understood relative to God or alternatively as something 'innate' on a biological or psychological level. More significantly, scholars from religious studies, sociology and political theory have become aware of the salient

role played by the categories of religion and the secular, and their constitutive role in shaping the intellectual identity of modern Europe, whilst also projecting this identity through its political and economic projects. The anthropologist, Talal Asad, writes that secularism 'presupposes new concepts of "religion," "ethics," and "politics."'[1] The political significance of religion has also been argued for by the theorist of religion Daniel Dubuisson.

> Created by the West, enshrined in Western epistemology, and central to its identity, the concept of religion eventually came to be the core of the Western worldview. Since this notion is intrinsically linked to all the philosophies, complementary or competing, that have been invented in the West, the West cannot, at the risk of its own disintegration, do without it, because these global conceptions would then decompose into scattered or juxtaposed fragments.[2]

In other words, the 'religious' and the 'secular' have played a fundamental role in framing European self-identity, by effectively categorising European reality into religious and secular dichotomies. What is real, or natural, has to fit into the belief that religion represents those things that stand outside of "possible knowledge" whilst the secular is the natural reality, once religion is removed. Significantly, the religious and the secular do not always amount to straightforward binary opposites. Indeed, 'secular' ideas like nationalism, popular sovereignty, or human rights are easily transcendentalised across cultures and above history, in a way that problematises the neat religious and secular divide.

Therefore, according to religious studies scholar Timothy Fitzgerald 'what counts as 'religion' and what counts as 'the secular' are mutually delimiting and defining concepts, the distinction between them continually shifting depending on the context.'[3] Let us try to grasp Fitzgerald's point on the mutually constitutive nature of 'religion' and 'the secular,' because it

[1] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, Stanford University Press 2003) 2
[2] Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*: *Myths, Knowledge and Ideology* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press 2003) 95
[3] Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Introduction' in Timothy Fitzgerald (ed) in *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (Bergen, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2009) 15

is one that has come to acquire great significance in religious studies and in the literature on secularism and secularisation.[4] We have noted that the intellectual discourse of evil in Europe has been profoundly shaped by Christian theology and history. What is important to note is that although Christianity and religion are very often treated synonymously, they are in fact distinguishable. The Latin term '*religio*' which is the source for the English term 'religion'[5] has undergone enormous intellectual transformation, from originally signifying 'ancestral practices of particular communities"[6] to being identified with belief in God, or faith in Jesus. This transformation is the result of Protestant-Enlightenment thinking, figures like Luther, Calvin, Locke, Hume and Kant, assumed that religion must be a universal belief system experienced in a private non-political manner. In other words, the modern category of religion as a private belief system has been created by secular reason, to denote forms of knowledge or ideas that are either not intellectually assimilable to public reason, or too dangerous for public expression, because of its propensity to incite violence and therefore must be held privately. As a result, religion stands as the 'other' of secular categories like 'science' 'naturalism' 'politics' 'the law' 'the nation' 'economics' 'capitalism' or 'materialism' and not as the fundamental bedrock of immanent and transcendental reality, as it did in medieval society. This binary was consolidated in the nineteenth century, by the professionalisation of academic disciplines like sociology, psychology, anthropology and history and secondly the narrative of secularisation, which predicted the inevitable collapse of organised religion.[7]

What we can see here is the ontological priority of the secular over religion, to the extent that the secular is identifiable with the natural, real, objective, scientific and as the only pathway

[4] See Timothy Fitzgerald *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press 2000) Linell Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd*, Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*, 1st ed. (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press 2003)
[5] Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Introduction' 12
[6] Ibid 13
[7] See Masuzawa, Tomoko, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2005) Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London, Routledge 2009) Chapter's 1 and 2.

to becoming a modern individual, or a modern society. As a result, the entire concept of evil is demoted by secular disciplines, as belonging to a non-naturalistic understanding of reality that is denoted as religious.[8] It follows that the modern definition of religion as metaphysical and apolitical, is a construction of secularity that looks to empty the secular spaces of science, economics and politics away from the interference of religion. To denote evil as religious or suggest that we secularise evil, positions it within a discourse that has fundamentally been constituted by a Christian genealogy and above all the massive universalisation of this genealogy though the projection of European intellectual and political power.

To summarise, the aim of this thesis is to explore and to interrogate the different European discourses of evil and how they have undergone transformation within Europe's secular modernity. Fundamental to this transformation has been secularisation and its role in re-shaping the place of religion in society. A development which also projects a normative trajectory for social evolution that in general is *away from religion*. This process of secularisation has produced a multiplicity of register of evil: including theological, philosophical, literary, sociological, psychological and most recently social-psychological. Yet the most obvious place for intellectual reflection on the place of evil is to examine evil through the inter-section of the categories of religion and the secular. The modern discourse of evil is made intelligible through the use of these two categories. Most scholars have failed to pay much significance to the importance of the categories of *religion* and *secular* in the study of evil. One reason is that the significance of these categories, and their historicist intent is something that is found predominantly in religious studies, and therefore outside the context of traditional scholarship on evil. In situations where there is an acknowledgement of evil as a secular concept, scholars tend to presume reductive views of religion, as something 'traditional' 'supernatural' or 'metaphysical.' And therefore, failing to understand that these interpretations of religion are

[8] Michel Wieviorka, *Evil* (Cambridge, Polity 2012) 1

themselves a by-product of the construction of the category of the secular and the binary of the religion and secular.

What we will see in this thesis is that an *exclusively secular discourse cannot really replace the function of a theological discourse of evil*. There are many reasons for this, and we shall elaborate these in this thesis. However, most significantly, I will argue that secularised conceptions of evil can only be understood in relation to the category of religion against which it defines itself. It has to draw upon religion to make evil intelligible.

A Secular Age

By exploring discourses of evil, we can ask what happened to evil in a secular age? The title and conceptualisation of this thesis owes considerable inspiration to Charles Taylor's panoramic study, *A Secular Age*. One reviewer described the work as 'an event of immense importance for intellectual historians, philosophers and social theorists.'[9] Taylor's work is a formidable reference for Western intellectual history as it weaves together some of its most formative transformations: Church councils, the renaissance, the reformation and the enlightenment into a narrative detailing the secularisation of religious belief. What Taylor offers is a historical narrative on how the secular came to be understood as the dominant intellectual background through which European self-understanding takes place. If we are to understand evil as a discourse and how this discourse transforms within secular modernity, we need to grasp the secularisation of Christianity into secular Europe.

I. Subtraction Stories

At the centre of the work are what Taylor calls "subtraction stories," which can be understood as narratives Europeans have told themselves, narratives that help to explain how and why

[9] Peter Gordon, "The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor's 'A Secular Age"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, No. 4 (2008) 649

society was secularised. It therefore details the removal of religious beliefs and its replacement with science, sovereignty and capitalism. Taylor presents three meanings of secularity; the most common meaning is the institutional separation of religious from political structures that left religion as 'largely a private matter.'[10] The second meaning of 'secularity' consists of 'falling off of religious belief and practice'[11] so that people no longer attend Churches or identify themselves as 'Catholic' 'Calvinist' or 'Presbyterian.'

The most recognisable of these 'subtraction stories' is Weber's *Entzauberung der Welt*, as *the disenchantment of the world*. Briefly, Weber believed rationalisation had demoted magical beings and beliefs, so they no longer carried any force in determining natural reality. The result of instrumental reason was that 'One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed.'[12] Taylor, broadly follows Weber in attributing rationalisation to Christianity, for Taylor it is medieval Church reform, this is accelerated by the reformation, which removed intermediary authorities, thereby disenchanting magical power from the world. However, the trouble with 'subtraction stories' like Weber's, and similar ones postulated by Marx or Freund, is they believe that because religious beliefs cannot be reconciled with what counts as natural reality, this is enough to exclude it as a valid barometer of human experience. That is, it concludes that religion is false, because of its magical beliefs and sets about building a story that proves these assumptions.

Taylor replaces these 'subtraction stories' with his deeper understanding of secularity, one which is not only more comprehensive, but essential to explaining the deeper shifts that also propelled the secularisation of evil. This third meaning of secularity, focuses on the 'conditions of belief', that have transformed Latin Christendom into secular Europe. Taylor writes 'the

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass Harvard University Press 2007) 1
[11] Ibid 2
[12] Max Weber 'Science as Vocation' In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (ed) HH Gerth and C Wright Mills (Routledge, London 1970) 139

change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.'[13] This is arguably the most significant line in the eight-hundred pages of *A Secular Age*. What accompanies the transformation of religious belief into an option is not a story we tell ourselves, but a shift in the situation of the self. Taylor writes that 'in the enchanted world, the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not at all clearly drawn.'[14] The relative fluidity between mind and body, meant malevolent beings or evil spirits, could actually penetrate or possess individuals to cause great suffering because *nature was permeated by intrinsic power*. As a result, this premodern world was defined by a 'porous' self, made vulnerable to 'a whole gamut of forces' including 'super-agents like Satan himself plotting to encompass our damnation, down to minor demons.'[15] The transition to a disenchanted self doesn't take place once we remove magical beliefs, in order to reveal natural reality, but rather, there is a change of sensibilities that make it impossible to believe in enchanted power. For Taylor, this 'different existential condition' is delimited by a 'buffered' self which disengages 'from everything outside the mind.'[16] One of the greatest results of this shift from a 'porous' to a 'buffered' self, is that fear and a sense of vulnerability to malevolent power in nature, has been taken out of the mind and the world, to the extent that the self is in sovereign control of its actions and destiny.

The transition from the 'porous' into 'buffered' self can be understood more generally as the growth of human autonomy and the loss of 'power' within nature. It marks the important step between the discourse of evil understood through a cosmos dominated by Christian and Platonic one of forms distinguished from matter into one that is dominated increasingly by independent nature and human autonomy, to the extent that human freedom is master over

[13] Taylor, *Secular Age* 3
[14] Ibid 32
[15] Ibid 33
[16] Ibid 38

nature. In other words, it marks the transition of the discourse of evil into modernity and being understood through the category of religion and the secular as the overriding framework through which we make sense of existence.

Although Taylor provides a guiding historical framework for this thesis, we are not bound by his story of secularisation. One difficulty is that he also places a bit too much onus upon secularisation through disenchantment and instrument rationality. Although, the importance of instrumental rationality is essential to the scientific revolution and the moral revolution that propels secularisation. This leaves us with a monolithic understanding of secularisation, Taylor is aware of this, and this is implied through the importance he assigns to Church reform as the engine for disenchantment. At the same time, it is also important to flag up, the continuing relevance of Christian conceptualisations, within the secular, and the extent to which these conceptualisations contribute to the formation of the secular. Löwith found the modern philosophies of history, theorised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Voltaire, Turgot, Condorcet, Comte, Proudhon, Hegel and Marx) were rooted in Christianity. [17] Löwith's thesis is that the 'philosophy of history originates with the Hebrew and Christian faith in a fulfilment and that it ends with the secularization of [that faith's] eschatological pattern.'[18] The optimistic faith in progress that dominated eighteenth and nineteenth century discussion was in fact backward looking, in terms of gaining inspiration from its Christian past, although this was something the anti-Christian, anti-religious or anti-ecclesiastical thinkers of the enlightenment barely acknowledged. Secularist attempts to discern a scientifically objective law in history, in order to cement the conviction that progress was inevitably taking place, was misplaced. Instead, the entire conviction of progress, powering secularisation and therefore creating an

[17] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*: *The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, Chicago University Press 1949)
[18] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* 2

entirely new society, was really the Christian hope for the Kingdom of God that is disguised by secularisation and the philosophies of history that underpin it.

Löwith's theory doesn't reject Taylor's secularisation narrative or the idea of subtraction stories. The running idea is the continuation of Christian ideas within the secular, and the secularisation of these ideas by science, political liberalism and moral freedom preserves a connection to religion. What is important to note is that a lot of secular thought, of the more aggressive type exemplified by Voltaire, Comte and Marx, remains in a kind of self-denial continuity of religion in their thought. This attitude of having overcome religion is essential to the modern discourse of evil that divides it along the lines of religion and the secular.

II. Evil in Secular Age: A Subtraction Story

An example of the subtraction story Taylor is thinking of is Andrew Delbanco's work *The Death of Satan*: *How Americans Have Lost Their Sense of Evil.* Although, this work is outside the geographical scope of Latin Christendom, America's intellectual genealogy of 'renaissance humanism', 'church reform' and 'enlightenment reason' remains within a European space. According to Delbanco 'for the "infant" Americans three hundred and fifty years ago, evil had a name, a face, and an explanation.'[19] Historically, evil was 'personified in the Devil, and it was attributed to an original sin committed in Eden and imputed by God to all mankind.'[20] For Delbanco, what contributed to the Death of Satan was firstly the power of scientific reason and subsequently moral autonomy. At the centre of this new rationalism 'was a vision of the human mind as a machine liable, like any other to malfunction.'[21] This allowed empiricists like Hobbes and Locke to dismiss Satan as "fictions of the mind" which associated real world entities with those of a terrified imagination. The second cause for the decline of Satan is the reformulation

[19]Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan*: *How Americans Have Lost Their Sense Of Evil*, (New York, Farrar Giroux 1995) 4
[20] Ibid 4
[21] Ibid 64

of ‘pride’ from the most demonic of all the seven deadly sins, into a personal virtue. Delbanco writes that ‘Pride of self, once the mark of the devil, was now not just a legitimate emotion but America’s uncontested God.’[22]

Delbanco’s thesis is fascinating, however what I would add is that he constructs belief in the devil as something that is quite fixed. As Burton Russell has shown in his histories of the devil, this understanding has since antiquity undergone significant transformation from previous representations.[23] It is therefore not impossible to suggest that the death of Satan reflects another stage in its evolution, and in the case of the modern ‘devil’, it has been moving away from the ubiquitous Satan inspired by and canonised by the reformation. The number of options and registers to make sense of evil multiplies through modernity, from radical evil, banality of evil, evil as harm, evil as wrongdoing, sadistic evil, satanic evil, pure evil, social evil, terrorists, child killers, serial killers, Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot. The vocabulary and references for evil multiply with every passing decade. In the absence of the real Satan, people look to other ways and substitutions to express this haunting need to comprehend evil. What is essential to this discourse in modernity is how we make sense of evil is through the separation of religion and the secular.

On Evil

The preceding section outlined Taylor’s narrative of secularisation as a general historical framework for understanding what happened to evil through secularisation. The idea of ‘conditions’ of belief allow us to understand the deeper transformation brought out by secularisation, rather than exclusively through differentiation of religious and political structure or the removal of magical beliefs. These remain important but there is a greater transformation to how we belief and how we imagine that ourselves as secular being wrapped

[22] Ibid 106
[23] See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press 1987)

inside of an exclusively this worldly 'Immanent Frame.' Furthermore, the transformation of beliefs allows us to see how deeply Christian belief was embedded into the entire cosmos and how deep is the transformation secularisation brings. It is the change in the 'conditions of belief' and the movement to a completely different self that we must also think about when considering the secularisation of evil and attempts to create a secular concept of evil. This transformation can be understood as a different understanding of nature and human freedom. However, we shall arrive at this point in a subsequent chapter.

I. Why Study Evil

Looming in the background of this study is the normative question – why should the secular be interested in evil, or find it worthy of philosophical analysis? Even if evil is not a transhistorical concept, for some people, educated within a secular public culture, the idea of evil is synonymous with something 'demonic' and 'evil spirits' represented by religion, literature, art or contemporary film. It offers a way to rationalise horrific violence. Therefore, evil may have been a worthy adversary for a traditional society, where malevolent forces explained floods or unorthodox religious behaviour, but the domination of instrumental rationality has disenchanted evil by turning metaphysical causes for evil into 'folk tales.' Furthermore, to the secularist, it is baseless to pursue a philosophical investigation into an idea that has little explanatory value. Modern moral theory analyses motives, intentions, goals and belief, through the framework of practical rationality, in order to make sense and explain human action, there is little pragmatic value in naming an action or a person as evil. Calling Ted Bundy evil, doesn't tell us very much about his deeds, rather it stalls conversation by reducing the possible explanation of his action to some transcendental idea.

At the same time, the lens can also be directed back at the secular, in order to raise doubts of its capacity to comprehend human action, that is so horrific, relegating it into a non-metaphysical realm inside of an exclusively non-judgemental neutral language, like that of

harm or wrong, is simply not satisfying. For Delbanco, the disenchantment of Satan also signals a fundamental loss in comprehensibility, as opposed to a triumphant victory of reason and the cold light of reason making horrific action explicable. He writes that 'A gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it.'[24] Delbanco's pessimism over how to respond to the incomprehensibility of evil is part of a broader condition that Taylor describes as the 'malaise of modernity' that is brought into existence by the replacement of religious belief within secular modernity. Taylor claims there is 'a wide sense of malaise at the disenchanted world, a sense of it as flat, empty, a multiform search for something within, or beyond it, which could compensate for the meaning lost with transcendence; and this not only as a feature of that time, but as one which continues into ours.'[25] Disenchantment creates feeling of being trapped or "cross-pressured" between a religious tradition alienated from our basic understanding of reality and a secular humanism that is indifferent to ones deepest emotions. There is no returning to religious orthodoxy and the path of progress towards further disenchantment produces an empty materialism incapable of responding to something other. In this regard, the basic default worldview that we inhabit is described by Taylor as the 'Immanent Frame.' Taylor writes that

> It is the sense of an absence; it is the sense that all order, all meaning comes from us. We encounter no echo outside. In the world read this way, as so many of our contemporaries live it, the natural/supernatural distinction is no mere intellectual abstraction. A race of humans has arisen which has managed to experience its world entirely as immanent. In some respects we may judge this achievement a victory for darkness, but it is a remarkable achievement nonetheless.[26]

In the absence of a meaning outside of Immanent Framework, secular reason can be accused of conceiving normal human relationships in a purely instrumental manner, something that fails to understand the depth or indeed the depthless-ness of what evil represents. There is an

[24] Ibid 3
[25] Taylor, *Secular Age* 306
[26] Ibid 376

understandable sense of disappointment whereby the compulsion to exclude religion for the sake of a supposed moral neutrality also robs human beings with a powerful tool to express the shattering emotions that evil as an idea represents to the imagination and we then present this into a relatable discourse. The former Archbishop Rowan Williams captures the poverty of imaginative feeling that secularism brings in the following passage.

> Does modernity allow for evil or only a thinly conceived good and bad or, worse still, progressive and reactionary, useful and redundant? If that's the case, secularism as the necessary companion of modernity, leaves us linguistically bereaved; we are vulnerable because we have no way of making sense of the most deeply threatening elements in our environment. 'Evil' becomes a trivially emotive way of referring to what we hate or fear or just disapprove of (in the style beloved of American presidents), rather than a reminder of – well, a reminder of what, exactly? Perhaps of the fact that there are aspects of human behaviour which we only make sense of when we can't make sense; or of an awareness of the roots of motivation aren't exhausted by the sum total of what we can call reasons.[27]

Evil is justifiable as an important question for reflection, not simply because it accounts for our capacity to inflict suffering, but it raises questions about our moral beliefs that are relevant today. At the same time, we must recognise these anxieties or questions provoked by evil are symptom of the culture of secular modernity, its anxieties towards final meanings, yet desiring some certainty, and finally how it out to confront the return of religion which poses existential questions over the finality of secular modernity. Hence a twentieth century that contained two world wars, nuclear bombings, holocausts and genocides reinforces a pessimistic conception of human nature and also a need of facing up to our capacity for cruelty and not just human flourishing. There are reasonable doubts that the substitution of evil with aggression, fear, crime, genocide, harm or the sublime doesn't seem to capture evil. That is, we seem to be in need of evil without being able to articulate this need properly. What is significant is that secularity on account of its intellectual and political superiority over religion, has a propensity to turn the universal experience of suffering into one that corresponds to its own historically

[27] Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London, Bloomsbury 2015) 12

constituted categories, and promote these as the 'secular' and therefore the 'real' and 'natural' mode of articulating evil. What we hope to show in the course of this thesis is that despite the universal nature of suffering, how these experiences are represented or articulated are always are related to broader intellectual background that is secular. This background has produced numerous registers and languages to express these feelings of suffering and alienation from the world.

In sum, human self-understanding has been and continues to be so profoundly altered by *secularisation*, it is therefore worth investigating how the political, social and intellectual transformations wrought by secularisation have affected the question of evil. We are interested in the history of secularisation and the secularisation of evil within the broader process of secularisation. The significance of the historical background is fundamental to understanding what happened to evil.

II. Evil as a Discourse

The plurality of discourses of evil created by the secularisation of evil can be understood in relation to what Taylor describes as the 'nova effect.' One of the outcomes of secularisation is it creates a belief deficit whereby many persons are unable to mentally 'buffer' themselves into a purely secular reality once religious beliefs are no longer compelling. As a result, the opposition between religious orthodoxy and secular humanism becomes differentiated into incommensurable worldviews which produce a "nova effect" of multiplying discourses. To understand this notion of the "nova effect" we have to read it alongside Taylor's claim that beliefs 'are held within a context or framework of the taken-for-granted.'[28] This understanding of framework is borrowed by Taylor from phenomenologists like Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty who contributed to the idea of a 'background' as something that embedded

[28] Taylor, *Secular Age*, 13

social practices which in turn structured understanding for relating to the world.[29] This new background no longer supports a conception of evil as an ontological opponent. Instead, this shift in the background to an Immanent Frame pushes us to define evil in terms of its nature, either as rooted in innate aggression or alternatively the result of a morally responsible choice.

It is possible to make use of the nova effect. Firstly, it helps us see the anxiety many persons feel in trying to articulate a language or an answer to evil. That is, it reflects the mood of being 'disenchanted' with 'disenchantment.' The nova effect is one of the reasons why we ought to think of evil as a discourse, on account of evil's reformulation as moral, historical and social problem, that is produced by secularisation. This is not to claim a lack of nuance or sophistication to premodern interpretations of evil. But rather, the replacement of God who stands above nature with a human being who is above nature but also at the mercy of nature meant this new locus of evil, created an intellectual tension that was not apparent when evil was understood relative to God. This tension is tied to the possibility of experiencing moral freedom which has contributed to the multiplication of evil into a complex multifaceted discourse not strangled by religious orthodoxy or secular orthodoxy, but cross pressured by religion and secular understandings of reality.

In addition, the "nova effect" has brought out an inarticulacy about evil, in that evil can refer to any number of things. According to Baudrillard evil has become a metaphor for everything that is bad or feared within contemporary capitalist culture.[30] Robert Simon also expresses the futility of defining evil. He explains that 'Evil is a thick rope of many complex, twisted, and intertwined strands. An effort to comprehensively define evil is an impossible task, a 'fool's errand.'[31] These comments can also be read as referring to the plurality of academic disciplinary discourses that have tried to conceptualise evil. In philosophical literature, the most

[29] Gordon, *God*, 656
[30] Jean Baurdillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomenon*, trans James Benedict (London, Verso 1993) pp 81-82
[31] Marcus G. Singer, The Concept of Evil, *Philosophy*, Vol. 79, No. 308 (Apr 2004) 185

common understanding of evil is that of a moral concept. Claudia Card defines evil as a 'culpable intention to do someone intolerable harm, or to do something with that foreseeable result' whilst additionally '[i]n an evil deed, the intention succeeds.'[32] By contrast, Mary Midgley's work on *Wickedness* locates evil in human nature. Accordingly, 'natural evil' involves that 'We have somehow to understand, without accepting, what goes on in the hearts of the wicked. And since human hearts are not made in factories, but grow, this means taking seriously the natural emotional constitution which people are born with, as well as their social conditions.'[33] Although Card and Midgley force us to look at evil from the inside out, their respective disciplinary differences mean they articulate evil relative to moral freedom and natural causes respectively. This sense of inarticulacy diversifies further through the contribution of social scientists who are interested in the social and material conditions behind human action. Wieviorka writes that 'If evil lies within society and has not come from without by some sort of evil spell, whether natural or divine, if it is human, if it is a consequence of our action, then we have to ask the leading questions concerning the guilt, the conscience and the responsibility of its perpetrators, as well as those who endeavour to combat it.'[34] Katz defines evil behaviourally as something that 'focuses on how people behave toward one another – whether the behaviour of one person, or an aggregate of persons, is destructive to others.'[35] This has resulted in an increasing focus on self-deceptive and cognitive dissonance of perpetrator behaviour.

Additionally, Thomas Cushman and Jeffrey Alexander have also pointed out the sociological neglect of evil as well as possible uses in relation to social action.[36] David Parkins

[32] Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*: *A Theory of Evil* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2002) 20
[33] Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London, Routledge, 2001) 4
[34] Wieviorka, *Evil*, 12
[35] Fred Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil* (Ithaca, State University of New York Press 1993) 5
[36] See Jennifer Geddes (ed) *Evil: After Postmodernism* (London, Routledge 2001) Chapter 5 and María Pìa Lara, *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (California, University of California Press 2001) Chapter 9

edited *The Anthropology of Evil*,[37] provides a cross-cultural presentation of how evil has been interpreted outside the paradigm of Euro-Christian history. His contribution includes essays on Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian perspectives on evil. The contestation of the European metanarrative of modernity has also been presented in Jennifer Geddes in her edited work *Evil After Postmodernism*.[38] There is therefore a heterogeneity to the discourse on evil from a disciplinary standpoint that coheres with Taylor's idea of a nova effect. This is also in line with the claim made in the opening paragraphs, that interprets evil as a discourse varies across culture and history. What we have are different registers of evil, some belonging to religion, some internalised by various academic disciplines and other's that have been transmitted into the broader culture through film, literature and news. What binds these discourses is the extent to which their assumptions of 'what evil is' and 'how it is comprehended' are committed to a framework that divides reality into religious and the secular.

Structure of Thesis

In the previous sections we have introduced the key concepts that underpin this thesis alongside how these concepts have also been reformulated to provide a way of making sense of evil in a secular age. The most important concept in this thesis is the idea of discourses of evil. The claim that underpins this thesis is how we understand evil is as a discourse that is time-bound and in Europe, produced by a distinctively Christian and more recently secular European culture. This is therefore *not* a history of evil whereby we go through every important contribution to the understanding of evil. This is simply an interpretation to what happened to evil through the immense changes wrought by secularisation and the creation of religion and the secular as opposed intellectual categories. To the extent that we shall mention what evil is, its nature, or the Holocaust or the September 11, we want to use those events or acts as

[37] See David Parkin (ed) *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell 1985) Chapter's 1, 8-9 and 13.
[38] Geddes, *Evil: After Postmodernism*, Introduction and Chapter 1

examples or indeed catalysts for reshaping the discourse of evil, towards a different historical understanding of evil. I examine evil through the discourse of intellectual elites rather than through lens of those who experienced it or committed such actions. The aim is therefore not to provide an exhaustive account of evil, rather an exploration of thinkers whose work have contributed to the discourse of evil, but also to reflect on the anxieties and tensions and dissatisfaction with that discourse within Europe's secular modernity. This has naturally entailed hard choices over which figures to include, and given the scope of this work which travels from Plato to Arendt *via* nominalism and the reformation, some degree of narrative and analytical clarity may have been compromised. The hope is that the broader claims regarding evil's discursivity, its relationship to the secular age, and its attempts to move beyond the secular may provide a counter to these shortcomings.

Once of the most significant ways this culture has been articulated within modernity is in the strategic separation of religion and the secular, as supposedly opposing categories but which in reality are categories that are mutually constituting. The assumption that religion and the secular are irrevocably opposite, has had an important effect on the articulation of modern cultural and academic discourse, something that has had a profound impact on how we categorise, conceptualise and comprehend evil. Taylor's work has provided a framework that helps us to think about how evil was secularised. Of course, it reproduces this binary, but the extent to which we can think outside of religion of the secular remains unlikely.

The main outcome of secularisation is the removal of a sacred cosmos and more significantly an entire mode of believing that supported this cosmos. Its collapse has been replaced with an Immanent Frame, the 'sacred cosmos' of secular modernity, and it is in this new framework that evil has to be made intelligible. Essential to this 'frame' is a new understanding of nature and a radically autonomous human being. However, resistance to an exclusively Immanent Frame has also contributed to the immense proliferation of languages,

discourses, names and philosophies by thinkers, poets' and writers on trying to give some greater meaning to life. This search for a third way has impacted also how evil is reflected on and understood. Perhaps, the most profound of these understandings of evil is built upon the possibilities of human freedom and moral responsibility.

Once again, I need to stress that we are not interested in discovering the nature of evil in this thesis. Such an ambition is doubtless a serious intellectual pursuit and not something that I wish to devalue. However, I am interested in something that typically goes unnoticed in the secularist analysis of evil, which (naively I think) supposes they can finally come up with a fully secular conception of the 'nature' of evil or an 'explanation', yet it cannot but fail to make sense of certain imperatives, attitudes or sensibilities that the secular relies on through which it sets itself *against* religion. That is, religion is what is 'othered' or ridiculed in making the case for a secular concept of evil, without recognising this construction of religion is itself a secular construction. This is a point that doesn't get mentioned much in the literature on the secular concept of evil, and some of this is down to the nature of academic specialisation. However, one would think it ought to be important given the polemical tone of the contemporary debate between secular and religious politics. The claim that evil is not an essentialised category, but a discourse is meant to be read against the contemporary trend of trying to fix a perfect secular concept of evil. The view of this author is that any secular concept of evil has to find its identity in relation to something religious. That is in negating the religious, the secular is transcendentalising its own universality as the secular is also compelled to 'exclude' 'religion' and therefore 'religious' notions of evil. My point is there is always a messiness to this separation between religious and secular ideas. Can we really be sure there are secular dispositions and religious dispositions that propel atrocious human action? Indeed, believing in a self-contained secular concept of evil tries to remove this entangled relationship without thinking how imbricated they are.

We shall try to make sense of, or our ways of making sense of evil in this thesis in a three-fold manner. Firstly, we are interested in making sense of the historical transformation of evil in the secular age. We shall examine the impact of secularisation upon European society, pushed through by nominalism, reformation and instrumental reason which helped to diminish belief in evil as malevolent power. Taylor conceptualises this transformation in terms of what he calls an "anthropocentric shift," which can be understood as marking the direction of evil travelling from God as the source of overcoming evil, to a nominalist God as the unknowable will behind good and evil and finally with human beings as the centre of good and evil. Neiman sums this up in the following statement 'Modern conceptions of evil were developed in the attempt to stop blaming God for the state of the world and to take responsibility for it on our own.'[39] The taking of responsibility means making evil's nature is intelligible and therefore something that could be removed through control over self and the world.

Secondly, we are interested in the consequences of this "anthropocentric shift" that roots evil into human freedom and more particularly evil as a moral problem. The general result of this shift towards humanism is that it has facilitated a sense that intellectual culture is a division between religious orthodoxy and secular humanism. The reality of this situation as outlined above is more complicated, and in fact, the binary between religion and the secular is more embedded in each other. A point we shall explore in parts one and two of this thesis. Naturally, a result of this shift towards viewing evil as a human problem, means that the debate over the question of evil's meaning, comprehensibility or explanatory power often bifurcates into a kind of intellectual stalemate between a religious and secular understanding of evil. The most recent of these discourses has come from within moral philosophy and the social sciences respectively, and their intent on developing a rigorous secular conceptualisation of evil. The

[39] Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 2002) 4

context for the emergence of this discourse of evil is an interesting one and is interpreted as a reaction to the perceived attack on secular values from religious fundamentalism. Interestingly, there was no clamour for a secular concept of evil in response to the Holocaust, which perhaps suggests that Europe's self-identity as a secular space is a more recent one, despite the long history of secularisation.

Lastly, we are interested in trying to think outside the 'malaise' brought about by secular modernity, therefore we shall be travelling back to move beyond the contemporary discontent with evil. As noted earlier, the breakdown of premodern forms of religious belief didn't leave with us with unbelief as the only option, but rather the feeling of transcendence still haunts a secular life. This feeling or desire for something beyond 'naturalism' or 'immanence' has created the "nova effect" of a multiplicity of discourses and languages within secular modernity. Taylor reflects that 'Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it.'[40] This '*third perspective*' is made of enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinkers that are sceptical of a framework that closes off the possibility of finding meaning beyond an exclusively natural human life. We are therefore interested in recovering the discourse of evil that arises from thinkers dissatisfied at being "cross-pressured" into either accepting secular humanism or religious orthodoxy and as such provide a radical critique of secular morality and secular conceptualisation of evil from within an Immanent Frame, but also seeking to move beyond it. The main thinkers examined in this thesis: Kant and Arendt, they produce a discourse of evil marked by immense originality, but also one's that have to be understood in relation to their criticism of secular modernity as something rigidly 'naturalistic' (Kant) or inspiring world alienating totalitarianism (Arendt). Importantly, their understanding of evil was never undergirded by a sense of disavowing the significance of something beyond in the

[40] Taylor, *Secular Age* 544

comprehension of evil. We shall see this in Kant's reliance on freedom and grace to overcome radical evil and Arendt's conviction that evil was not the result of modern self-assertion but following Augustine, the loss of conviction altogether. This '*third perspective*' to the discourse on evil is not meant to answer evil definitively but help us see that the relationship between religion and secular or transcendence and immanence is always moving through history.

I. Thesis Breakdown

This thesis is divided into three parts and a conclusion. Each of these parts is then divided into two or three individual chapters. These chapters are intended to contribute to the theme of each part whilst also providing greater analysis of the arguments and aims set out above.

Part one, is the historical dimension of the thesis and is named 'Transformations.' It consists of three individual chapters: 'The Metaphysics of Evil: Plato, Plotinus and Augustine', 'The Reformation of Evil: Between Divine and Human Freedom' and 'Modernity and Evil.' The aim of this Part is to contribute to an understanding of the secularisation of evil, and how belief in evil has been transformed. Given our interest in the evolution of secularity within Latin Christendom, the opening chapter is a discussion of the Greco-Christian contribution of Plato, Plotinus and mostly Augustine in shaping the debate on evil. Essential to this chapter is the 'form' and 'matter' distinction as providing the fundamental grounding upon which the intelligibility of evil was erected until it was disrupted by the reformation and modernity. An important argument running through part one is that secularisation doesn't necessarily take place in opposition to Christianity but rather through Christianity. Of particular importance is the nominalist revolution for reformulating the traditional understanding of God and turning the intelligibility of evil into a battleground between God and human freedom in the comprehension of evil. The final chapter in this part looks at the reformulation of evil. In particular we want to highlight the replacement of 'religion' and the 'secular' as the resolution of the tension radicalised by the reformation. These turn into the dominant categories of

modernity, and in general contribute to the intelligibility of evil in the supposed absence of religion and God.

Part two, is the 'Limits of the Secular' looks at the consequences of the anthropocentric shift in the contemporary context where the very idea of secularisation and secularism is being loudly questioned. It also consists of two chapters: 'Religious and Secular Violence: The Trouble with Secularism' and 'The Problem with a (secular) concept of Evil.' In the first of these chapters, we are interested in how one of the registers in which evil is discussed today is through the medium religious violence and in particular the self-understanding among many secularists that religion is particularly violent compared to secularism. I will show how this understanding is in fact dependent on how religion and religious violence has been constructed and remembered in Europe. In the subsequent chapter, we look at contemporary attempts to develop a secular concept of evil. It is argued that we must pay careful attention to the context in which the contemporary demand of a secular concept enters. Additionally, we find that the demand of a purely secular of evil is undone by certain assumptions of what religion is, that derives from a specifically Euro-Christian genealogy. Therefore, however stringently a purely secular concept of evil tries to deny religious understanding, it finds itself ineluctably drawing upon some notion of the religious for the intelligibility or unintelligibility of evil.

This paves the way for Parts Three, 'An Eye to God.' The aim of this part of the thesis is to make use of Taylor's notion of 'cross-pressures' which refers to thinkers or intellectual movements that occupy an intermediate space between religious orthodoxy and 'exclusive humanism' and therefore represent one strand of the so-called 'nova affect.' Here we shall focus on the discourse of evil produced by Kant and Arendt whose concepts of 'radical evil' and the 'banality of evil' have had a unique impact on modern conceptualisations of evil. What is important is that both respective works are critical of secular philosophies of naturalism and totalitarianism but also represent a sincere attempt to part ways from religion. However, the

very intelligibility of evil puts up resistance that compels both of them to draw upon on religious understanding of evil. The first chapter in this part is titled 'Radical Evil: Between Freedom and Sinfulness' and looks at the evolution of Kant's understanding of evil from his early moral philosophy to his later work on religion. What is important to note is that Kant is carefully avoiding a purely naturalistic conception of evil and one that is overtly religious, in favour of one rooted in moral freedom. However, we shall examine how this credible attempt to open up an independent for the intelligibility of evil is frustrated and Kant is forced to concede that evil is 'inscrutable.' The second chapter is titled the 'The Incomprehensibility of Radical and Banal Evil' and covers Arendt reception and re-interpretation of radical evil and her supposed replacement of this idea with the more famous notion of the 'banality of evil.' What I hope to show is that there is certainty continuity between the 'radical' evil and its 'banal' manifestation in Eichmann. This is clarified by grasping the importance of comprehending the incomprehensibility of totalitarianism that dominates her work. Like Kant, Arendt's work represents a sincere attempt to disentangle evil from its 'religious' codifications but her profound life-long interest in classical philosophy forces her to rely on conceptualisations of evil that are distinctly Augustinian, and this is reflected in her denotation of Eichmann as a 'thoughtless' and 'shallow' perpetrator. Finally, I will conclude with 'Evil in a Secular Age' that hopes to recapitulate and draw out the main findings in this thesis.

Part One: Transformations

1. The Metaphysics of Evil: Plato, Plotinus and Augustine

The aim of this section is to examine the historical reformulation of evil. This reformulation travels from evil as a metaphysical discourse in the world of antiquity, to its essential secularisation during the enlightenment. The secularisation of evil is triggered by the reformation, whereby the intelligibility of evil bequeathed by antiquity through Platonism is questioned by the new philosophical and theological developments taking place in the Middle Ages. We shall explore this secularisation through this and the subsequent two chapters.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the intelligibility of evil through the 'form' and 'matter' distinction. This begins with Plato, for whom the form and matter distinction is preserved in the ideas that correspond to the good and are therefore distinguished from the contingent world of appearances and materiality. For Plato, the material world is not exclusively evil, but only to the extent that it is distinguished from the world of forms i.e., the good. The form and matter distinction is also preserved in Plotinus, who subsequently grounds evil into an elaborate emanationist-cosmological scheme. Plotinus goes onto formulate evil as derived from matter and therefore the privation of being, which has a significant impact on Christianity through the work of Augustine. What is different in Augustine is that evil as articulated through the form and matter distinction is ultimately consolidated into a universe under the command of a providential God. Therefore, evil in part can be explained as belonging to the diminished and corrupting world of matter created the fall. Finally, although the form and matter provide a theoretical robustness compared to other intellectual schemes contemplated by Augustine. Ultimately, there are new theological problems raised by Christianity, with regards to the nature of God, free will and divine providence, that fall outside the context of the form and matter distinction. Nevertheless, Augustine's intellectual synthesis of Platonic metaphysics with Christian theology to ground evil was a successful and influential one because it provided a robustness and clarity to evil. What brought down the privation theory

of evil was not exclusively an intellectual problem, but the collective social and political transformations brought by nominalism, the reformation and the enlightenment. As result we shall (i) introduce the ideas of Plato and Plotinus on how evil is a negation of the good or the world of forms and then subsequently (ii) Augustine's attempt to reconcile the Platonic legacy with the Christian faith.

Plato and Plotinus on Evil

Let us begin with Plato as providing the philosophical ground for evil in the form and matter distinction. There is actually very little specific Platonic commentary on evil, in so far as much as there isn't a particular dialogue which contains all of Plato's insight on where evil originates, or if it can be eliminated.[1] What is nevertheless significant in Plato is that he provides the essential structure to make evil intelligible through his fundamental ontology of the forms. This is most famously set out in the allegory of the cave in *The Republic*,[2] whereby the images projected on the cave wall is an analogy for the 'ideas' or 'forms' that we experience in the phenomenal world; the appearances are always lacking in goodness and reality of the ideal forms that exist eternally. Plato is not claiming that all appearances in the material world are evil, because they are opposed to the perfection of the forms. This would commit him to a very Manichean dichotomy of the material world that was purely evil, and an intelligible world that was purely good. Instead, we can understand Plato's contribution to the intelligibility of evil as taking place through structuring a close identification between the good and the world of forms or ideas.

It follows, the identification of the forms with goodness also provides human actions with a standard of rationality or indeed intelligibility. Whereby the falling away from this standard

[1] Harold Cherniss, The Sources of Evil According to Plato, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol 98, No. 1 (Feb 1954) 23
[2] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans Francis Macdonald Cornford (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1941) vii 514 A-521 B

grounded by the forms constitutes a fall into desire instead of rationality, or more specifically, falling into the materiality of appearances, instead of the goodness of the forms. Although it is only implicit in Plato, his fundamental ontology of identifying forms and goodness provides the structure onto which evil as the falling away from rationality, goodness and forms could be expressed. It follows, that as evil is contained within a phenomenal reality, this reality is always diminishing in reality and moving further away from participating in goodness.

Another important dialogue that contributes to the intelligibility of evil in Plato, is the cosmogony of *Timaeus,* which explains the cause of the physical universe. In the creation myth retold in *Timaeus*, Plato introduces the Demiurge, or God(s) who created the universe. The Demiurge is characterised as 'good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be.'[3] The Demiurge, however, is not responsible for the origination of 'ideas' or 'forms', according to Timaeus, these are already existent, on account of the fact that 'there is and ever will be one only-begotten and created heaven.'[4] Additionally, the Demiurge is not an eternal form, and thus like the universe; it is the rational cause of the divine and a resemblance of the archetypal heavenly form. Nevertheless, the cosmos brought to bear by the Demiurge is modelled on these eternally existent forms. What Plato is therefore saying is the rational origin of the universe is defined as generating from the good.

Despite the goodness of forms, and the rational origin of the good, this still begged the question that subsequent Platonists would have to wrestle with, and that is where do evils come from? Indeed, if the world of forms is rational and the cause of the good, are everyday sufferings simply the appearance of suffering and the result of inferior materiality? How do we make sense of the tremendous forces of chaos and destruction that threaten existence? The list

[3] Plato, *Timaeus* trans Benjamin Jowett in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1961) 29 e / 30
[4] 31 a

of evils for antiquity included war, plagues, recurrent famines and earthquakes. The attachment to the goodness of the forms could be interpreted as also encouraging a willingness to live quietly beside the reality of pain and suffering. Furthermore, it is also the case that a comprehensive notion of the good leaves no space for its direct rival in the form evil, chaos and suffering. According to Cherniss, given the phenomenal world is a derogation of the world of forms, we might understand this movement away from the forms as "negative evil."[5] Therefore, we might take it that evil is not opposed to the good in the sense of evil containing some deviant substance that leaves it opposed to the good. Rather, the negativity of evil can be traced to the following principles: indeterminacy, (*apeiron*) divergence, (*thateron*) and embodied existence (*sōmatoeides*).[6] In other words, the intelligibility of evil distinguishes the rationally perfect cosmos of forms from the phenomenal world of materiality and change. The negativity of evil is taken to mean how the phenomenal world reflects imperfectly the rational goodness of the world of forms. The world of materiality is not intrinsically evil because it's association with forms means there is the possibility of the good.

The key subsequent figure in the development of the metaphysics of evil is Plotinus. Plotinus begins his enquiry into where evils originate or 'enters into beings'[7] through questioning 'what precisely Evil is, what constitutes its nature.'[8] Plotinus notices there are difficulties to simply adopting a notion of evil that is perhaps understood in 'the very absence of the Good.'[9] Although, the good 'is that on which all else depends, towards which all existence aspires' and is 'beyond beautiful, beyond the Highest, holding kingly state in the Intellectual Cosmos.'[10] If the nature of being is identified with the good then evil cannot occupy an independent space in being, compromising the absoluteness of the good. Therefore, to

[5] Harold Cherniss, 'The Sources of Evil According to Plato', 24
[6] James Wood, "Is There an 'Archê Kakou' in Plato?" *The Review of Metaphysics* 63, No. 2 (2009) 384
[7] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans Stephen MacKenna, second edition, (London, Faber and Faber) 66
[8] Ibid 66
[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid 67

understand the 'nature of evil' Plotinus elaborates a triune metaphysical system compromised of the primary metaphysical principle; the One, representing absolute good, derived from which is the secondary principle, the universal intellect (*nous*) and thirdly the soul.[11]

Instead, for Plotinus, the intelligibility of evil corresponds to deriving it from the material world. Plotinus writes that 'The bodily Kind, in that it partakes of Matter, is an evil thing.'[12] The material world emanates from the One, but represents the lowest level of reality, and therefore it is not completely penetrated by the reality of the One. The form taken by matter is therefore not its 'real' form and as such is always moving away ceaselessly from the perfection of the One. This robust identification of matter and evil is therefore essential to understanding the development of evil and appreciating the originality of Plotinus' contribution to the question of where evil comes from, if its reality is defined exclusively by the good. In practical terms, the corruption inherent in matter helps to explain why natural evils like earthquakes occur. Furthermore, the corruption of the soul by matter, also explains the reasons and motivations that cause people to reject the good and act through moral vices.

Therefore, because evil has no positive footing in reality, given it derives from the material world, it is defined completely negatively by Plotinus. Evil is recognised as something whose existence is defined by the lack of being, and to this extent a privation of goodness. Plotinus writes that 'if Evil exists at all, that it be situate in the realm of Non-Being, that it be some mode, as it were, of the Non-Being, that it have its seat in something in touch with Non-Being or to a certain degree in Non-Being.'[13] By stressing the non-being of evil, Plotinus is not denying evil, in so far as asserting that it lacks any positive depth. What causes this fluctuation from being is the closeness of evil and matter. Plotinus adds 'that Matter is without Quality and that it is evil: it is evil not in the sense of having Quality, but precisely in the sense of not having

[11] Ibid 67
[12] Ibid 69
[13] Ibid 67

it; give it Quality and it's very Evil it would almost be a form, whereas in truth it is a kind contrary to form.'[14] In practice this may be taken to mean that the worst forms of evil, are those in which there is no desire, no hope, no temptation, no love, no grief. What determines the unreality of evil is its sheer indeterminacy that coheres to no standard of the good and remains utterly indifferent to standards of evaluation altogether. Yet, despite the elegance of his system, treating evil as a dark otherworldly substance is nevertheless alienated from the actual face to face reality of pain. The negation of evil is culpable in devaluing the actual experience of evil and how it destroys life.

Augustine

Augustine has profoundly shaped the discussion on evil in the theological and philosophical discourse of Christendom and Europe respectively. His thesis on the nature of evil, or its relationship to free will and original sin, had a profound impact on the Middle Ages, the reformation and upon Kant and Arendt's formulations of evil as 'radical' and 'banality' respectively. His contribution is distinguishable from Plato and Plotinus because it is orientated by a God who creates all things and is also aware of every pain or suffering that creation is experiencing. This creates a profound metaphysical problem that was insignificant for Plato and Plotinus, but is drawn out in Augustine, regarding how far a creationist God is also culpable in the creation of moral and natural evils. A controversy that rumbled on until the enlightenment when Europeans took the responsibility for moral evil themselves and relegated natural evil to the law of nature.

Given Augustine's quite singular contribution, we are best dividing this discussion on evil into a number of theses: (i) his reaction to Manichean dualism and his solution through the privation; (ii) the importance of free will and moral evil resulting from a defective will; (iii) evil as related to the question of divine providence and justice.

[14] Ibid 75

From Manicheanism to the Privation theory of Evil

Augustine's earliest recollection of evil is perhaps his most famous one, and is contained in his autobiographical work *Confessions*. Augustine recalls the time when he along with some fellow adolescents stole pears from the farmers orchard. These pears that were deliberately stolen and in complete jest were subsequently thrown away as pig fodder. Augustine recounts the experience of becoming evil in quite blissful terms.

> Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in I had become evil for no reason. I had no motive for my wickedness itself. It was foul and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself.[15]

What is important is not the act that was the problem for Augustine. The fact he had stolen, had committed a wrong and behaved sinfully was not the problem. It was how he felt in the act of transgression, how his being was changed doing something that was forbidden by succumbing to temptation. This futility in actual experience defined evil for Augustine. The same point was later something Arendt picked up on and how it defined the nature of evil. Augustine had become wicked but for no apparent reason or meaningful goal in life. Between the image of evil as suffering, tragic, redemptive and destruction, there was a gaping void in the experience of evil as vague, negating, motiveless and nihilistic. In loving his fall into self-destruction, Augustine was not loving a thing but nothingness or indeed merely the appearance of a thing.

Augustine's autobiography informs us that before coming to understand the nature of evil as the privation of being, he spent the best part of a decade under the spell of the 'Manichees' (Manicheans) and their religion of dualism. What dualism offered, and this possibly explains Augustine's fascination with it for such a long time, is a rigorous understanding of evil that is related to saying something about the cause of evil and its roots in human nature. The attraction

[15] St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans Henry Chadwick (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1998) 29

of the Manicheans was that it found a place for evil that was an essential point to their philosophical system which explained why the universe existed and how it operated. In so far as evil was part of a cosmic struggle between two eternally opposed forces, light and darkness. Significantly, such an understanding could also be loosely assimilated to a Christian understanding, whereby the notion of God representing the supreme good (light) is opposed by an evil or satanic force (darkness). Additionally, Manicheans offered a version of dualism, in contrast to the Platonic dualism of 'reality' and 'appearance', whence the presence of evil was an immutable feature of the nature of reality. It posited an eternal darkness that wrestled with and corrupted eternal light, thus giving birth to the world of living bodies. The struggle of these two cosmic forces of light and darkness are continued within human nature; the propensity to evil or wickedness was the result of the dominance of the forces of darkness overcoming those of light. In its simplest form, moral and some natural evils are traced to the material body, and in particular the domination of desire over the soul radiating light and goodness.

Although Augustine embraced the Manichean solution to evil for the best part of a decade, from a Christian perspective it left great swathes of the intelligibility of evil unresolved. Firstly, its depiction of evil as overpowering in its reality, diverged from his own first-hand experience of evil as futile and shorn of depth. The Manicheans interpretation of evil bestowed a greatness upon evil that was not consistent with his belief that evil was ultimately something that fundamentally corrupts rather than opposes goodness. The evil person as a stupid non-entity was more representative than an evil person as possessed by demonic desire. Secondly, a cosmos divided by equally balanced forces of goodness and evil, also contradicted the fundamental theological standpoint of Christianity in which an omnipotent God exercises sovereignty over all things in the natural and human world. God's creative power to intervene in the world was seriously circumscribed by a co-eternal evil force that existed besides God. Just as the role of personal accountability for wrongdoing became obscured by an immutable

evil force. The Christian God had to be unlimited and unrestricted in its power and this included its power to eliminate evil.

Whilst Manicheanism offered an attractive and rigorous theory of where evil comes from and how this explains human action. It did so at the expense of compromising the essential tenets of Christian theology, because it threatened to turn God and God's goodness into a struggle with an alternative force over which the Christian God had little control. Theologically, the substance or material nature of evil could never be treated as an equal to the good because it diminished God's sovereignty.

The solution to the problem of evil provided by the Platonists is one that Augustine found compelling. Nevertheless, it wasn't a wholesale acceptance of Platonism. While the identification of evil and matter was conceptually useful, it relied on an understanding that the further one moved away from the One, the greater the involvement in evil. Therefore, the idea of material reality as representing evil failed to coincide with the Christian conviction that all human beings are created in the image of God and all human beings are proximate to God's grace. Furthermore, 'If everything apart from the First Principle has some admixture of evil, God would be responsible for creating evil things, which Augustine rejects.'[16] Augustine's acceptance of the Platonist framework of matter and form therefore comes with some reservations over its compatibility with the Christian God and Christian morality.

Augustine's contribution to evil begins with recognising the sovereignty of God is supported by traditional ontology. Evans writes 'Plotinus helped Augustine to perceive the transcendency of God more clearly by his emphasis upon the awful remoteness of the One.'[17]Augustine writes 'there is only one Good which will bring happiness to a rational or intellectual creature and that Good is God.'[18] And 'we say that there is only one unchanging Good; and that is the one, true,

[16] Peter King, 'Augustine on Evil' in *Evil*: *A History*, ed Andrew Chignell (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2019) 160
[17] Gillian Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982) 31
[18] Augustine, *City of God*, trans Henry Bettenson (London, Penguin 2003) 471

and blessed God.'[19] Additionally 'God supremely exists, and therefore he is the author of every existence which does not exist in this supreme degree.'[20] This ontological primacy also endeavours to give God a providential role in creation. He writes 'Those which have not been given an eternal existence obey the laws of the Creator in changing for the better or the worse in accordance with the lines of development he has laid down for them in the scheme of things; and all tend, in god's plan.'[21] If all existence is contingent on God, then even those things which are corrupted have some footing in the good, so long as there is existence. It follows that evil is therefore a falling away from the supremely good order through deviation in the non-immutable or secondary principles of being. Although, God is incorruptible, beings created by God are changeable, to the extent that evil arises when the originally intended purpose for these objects are corrupted and lose reality. Augustine writes that 'There is no such entity in nature as 'evil'; 'evil' is merely a name for the privation of the good.'[22] 'Evil is contrary to nature; in fact it can only do harm to nature…That is why the *choice* of evil is an impressive proof that the *nature* is good.'[23]Additionally good is necessity for evil 'if good did not exist in what is evil, neither could evil exist... for corruption is nothing else but the destruction of good.'[24] Like Plotinus, there is a relationship between evil and matter, whereby material reality like evil is not non-being but being that is losing reality.

The outstanding point made by privation theory is that it reasserts the ultimate futility and emptiness of evil. Cosmologically, being or goodness emanates from a singular source that incrementally loses goodness as it reaches the natural world. Morally, evil is never real because something that originates in the good can never be absolutely evil. Instead, evil gains meaning

[19] Ibid 472
[20] Ibid 477
[21] Ibid 476
[22] Ibid 454
[23] Ibid 448
[24] William Maker, "Augustine on Evil: The Dilemma of the Philosophers." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 15, No. 3 (1984) 154

from its parasitic relationship to goodness. We might interject here, to point out that the pain of losing a hand, one's livelihood or a loved one, is difficult to accommodate with the overriding notion that evil is simply the absence of the good and not something more deeply felt on a personal and existential level. Nevertheless theologically, privation allowed subsequent Christian orthodoxy to balance the created nature of evil without compromising God's unity or providential benevolence. Material things that stand apart from God are not evil, but the best thing is to see their goodness and evilness in degrees. This allows Augustine to avoid declaring the material nature of a thing determines their proximity to God and goodness. But the introduction of degrees to evilness and goodness meant evil lost that robust sense of intelligibility that was a feature of Plotinus. There was more scope for interpreting evil, whether as a natural event or moral action and as a result more indecision over the nature of evil. For Augustine, Platonic schools had gotten evil wrong to the extent that they believed goodness was defined in closeness to God. This disempowered God because the materiality of objects had a quality that once created meant God had a diminished sovereignty over it. Augustine therefore attempts to close some of the gap between created by Platonist metaphysics and privation of evil through a God that empowers human beings to have control over evil.

Augustine and Free Will

Next to the ontological argument over the nature of evil and its relation to the matter and form distinction is how we come to see certain things as good or evil. This is of course the problem of moral evil and how we explain the causes of evil in everyday interactions and relationships.

Augustine's influential answer to the problem of moral evil is found in his discussion of free will. Indeed, the contemporary conviction that evil is something that human beings must accept responsibility for has much of its basis in Augustine and his debate with the monk Pelagius. The distinction between a free will and an unfree (defective) will is fundamental to grasping the cause behind moral evil. The free will is essential if human beings are going to

have a conception of themselves as responsible agents and understanding divine punishment. For this to take place, free will has to be understood as rooted in rational nature, having a rational nature means that human beings determine their own action or course of life. In other words, free will is not simply something that compels movement but there is deliberation and reasoning towards an action.

The defective will is therefore the cause of moral evil because it disrupts the free will by compelling it to choose not what is rationally good. It therefore follows on from the concept of privation in that moral evil takes place because something of the rational nature is lacking when individual choices are made. Put simply, it is the absence of rational choice i.e., the good, which compels the jealous lover to seek violent revenge. The rational intellect is corrupted as it cannot see the good needed to flourish. According to Evans 'Everything Augustine has to say about evil must be read in light of one central principle: that the effect of evil upon the mind is to make it impossible for the sinner to think clearly, and especially to understand higher, spiritual truth and abstract ideas.'[25] The defective will corrupt rational nature and therefore the rational (or good) mind which is only illuminated by the eternal word of God. Corruption comes through what Burns describes as 'a kind of forgetfulness.'[26] This transpires from human fallenness and therefore failure to love God because those virtues that are meant for God are turned back towards the self, the body, the transitory and essentially the material world.

The most familiar vice and the breeding ground for moral evil in Christianity comes by way of excessive pride which instils the conviction that we are self-determining agents. Therefore, we are no longer served by obeying God's commandment, but rather choosing which commandments to obey. Augustine writes 'when he had turned towards himself his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree. And so, to abandon God

[25] Evans, *Augustine* 29
[26] Patout Burns, "Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil." *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 16, No. 1 (1988) 14

and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is come nearer to nothingness.'[27] One reasonable objection here is that free will is inherently a move that relies on some degree of pride. Self-governance through free will naturally creates a sense of independence which predisposes some human beings to see themselves as either independent of God or indeed God-like. Therefore, the defective will, and the free will are to some extent conjoined, if not in conception but at least in their outcomes.

To some extent this is made intelligible through Augustine's comparison of the *City of God* and the *City of Man* respectively. The two cities are distinguished by virtue of those under the dominion of the mind, spirit and the eternal *logos* and those under the dominion of the flesh, body, and materiality respectively. Augustine reverses the simple opposition of matter corrupting form, by stating that 'it was not the corruptible flesh that made the soul sinful; it was the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible.'[28] Augustine believes it is pride that is the 'fountainhead of all these evils'[29] and therefore the real enemy of human nature. It is through pride that humans forsake the limits established by God and live independently according to the 'standard of man.'[30] Augustine's more considered point on moral evil is that when humans begin to think that their preservation and happiness comes through self-willing and obeying the 'created good' of man over the supreme good founded by God they are on the road to ruin.

One result of the defective free will is that Augustine rejects the idea that some human beings have a propensity to moral evil. The essential cause behind evil lies in the distortion of the human will which forces people to disobey the good things that belong to God. Augustine writes that: 'the first evil act of will ….was rather a falling away from the work of God to its own works, rather than any substantive act.'[31] The genuinely free or good will is exercised in

[27] Augustine, *City of God* 572
[28] Ibid 551
[29] Ibid 552
[30] Ibid
[31] Augustine, *City of God* 568

relation to the freedom that is given by God. Given that 'good things can exist without evil' the free will is truly self-standing and autonomous because no part of it is obscured by the corruptions of nature. It follows that Adam was born totally free and remained free until he lived in obedience to God's will.

The relationship between the free will and evil nevertheless throws up several interesting theological dilemmas regarding the origin of moral evil and the extent of human culpability. Augustine's conclusive response to his interlocutor Evodius in his work *De libero arbitrio*, is the essential goodness of the will: 'you should also admit that free will, without which no one can live rightly, is a good thing and a divine gift.'[32] If this is true then how does something that originates as a gift from God becomes evil? At least some of the explanation for the origin of moral evil comes from the scriptural comment that 'pride is the start of every kind sin'; something that Augustine describes as a 'perverse kind of exaltation.'[33] Pride though doesn't represent evil entirely. It reflects a sense of hubris 'You will be like Gods', but pride is also essential to preserving faith and therefore resisting moral evil.

The source of moral evil therefore forces us to refer back to the nature of evil as falling away from God. The defective and imperfect will is only predisposed to willing the less good and so according to Augustinian ontology wills nothing at all. Augustine writes 'although the will derives its existence, as a nature, from its creation by God, it is falling away from its true being is due to its creation out of nothing.'[34] To appreciate this point more fully, we have to turn to Augustine's Neoplatonist inspired discussion of nature or substance. Augustine writes that 'the truth is that every nature *qua* nature is good'[35] and this is because every nature; whether corruptible or incorruptible comes in principle from God, so that 'every nature that

[32] Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings* ed and trans Peter King (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2010) 66
[33] Augustine, *City of God* 571
[34] Ibid 572
[35] Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 99

can become less good is good.'[36] However, nature is also to be understood as divided into a higher, spiritual form that 'holds fast to God and, in its celestial body, through its angelic power it also adorns earthly bodies and rules over them according to the bidding of Him Whose mere nod it beholds in some inexpressible manner.'[37] And a lower material form 'weighed down with its mortal body, scarcely controls from within the body that drags it down.'[38] Augustine's point in dividing the universe into a higher/lower nature is that the rational nature is compelled to obey the good since that is pre-decided to be its function and role: 'They do not persist in their good will because they received this role. Instead, they received it because it was foreseen by Him Who granted it that they would persist.'[39] But as we retreat lower down the universe's elemental scale that same compulsion to obey the good diminishes. This is not to say the lower nature is not involved in upholding the good, instead 'It affects other exterior things around it as it can, but its exterior activity is much weaker over them.'[40] Indeed, because of its relative distance from the highest nature, the lower nature abandons its role in upholding the good. Moreover, it is in this lower state the real struggle for moral freedom and the need to become 'worthy' for grace begins. There is a jeopardy and struggle to asserting goodness introduced by free will that was never possible under the more rigorous metaphysical system of Platonism.

Augustine on Providence and Theodicy

The burden of freedom is irrevocably tied to bearing the responsibility for evil, so that sin materialises when we decide to turn away from the eternally good will by which 'we seek to live rightly and honourably, and to attain the highest wisdom'[41] and instead live for the sake of temporal things. That said, one objection is that if the free will is responsible for sin and evil, who is it responsible for the will? Was Augustine admitting that somethings outside the context

[36] Ibid 99
[37] Ibid 97
[38] Ibid 97
[39] Ibid 97
[40] Ibid 97
[41] Ibid 21

of divine will? On what causes the will to will evil, the closest thing we have to a coherent answer in Augustine is that the question presupposes an infinite regress without any limit.[42] So that it is either the will itself which causes the will and so causes evil or alternatively there is no first sin that causes sin. Approaching the problem in this way was neither desirable nor logical because of infinite regress, therefore for Augustine it is best to imagine the original cause of evil as 'a wanton will'[43] through which 'man regards himself as his own light.'[44] In other words, a will that is totally autonomising and self-reliant that believes it can self-determine the highest good is what eases into and corrupts the heart.

Nevertheless, you might add that this doesn't directly answer the problem God's complicity in creating evil, and by permitting evil to take place we are excusing God. Surely an infinitely powerful God is also able to prevent human beings from sinning, so that innocent victims are spared from injustice. This is intrinsic to the problem of evil that both theists and non-theists have to wrestle with, but was outside of the structure established by Platonism. How to reconcile God's benevolence with human free will and the creation of moral evil? The solution devised by Augustine was to go outside of Platonism and is better known as the 'free will defence.' It can be understood in the following way: the possibility of moral evil is a result of possessing a free will, the free will is created by rational human beings, although God creates rational beings, he does not create the actions of rational beings. This is something that they must accept responsibility for themselves. This naturally raises the question of God's power and sovereignty over the free will and the extent to which God still retains ultimate control in the universe. There are however, two sides of this argument that are worth pointing out. Firstly, given free will is an undeniable good, even if moral evil is committed from freely willed actions, a free will contributes to the good because it implies human beings using their rational

[42] Ibid pp 106-7
[43] Ibid 107
[44] Augustine, *City of God* 573

nature to decide on moral action. Augustine therefore comes close to justifying Leibniz claim on the 'best of all words.' But this raised questions over how war or murder contributes to the good? Secondly, despite being blessed with the gift of free will, God does create human beings that are bound to some limits. The limits placed on rational human beings mean the power to transform or perfect oneself into the good solely through one's own intentional will was rejected by Augustine. He writes that 'as matters stand now, human beings are not good, and they do not have it in their power to be good – either because they do not see how they should be, or because they see it but they are not able to be such as they see that they should be.'[45] Human finiteness is supplemented by Augustine's influential doctrine that repentance from original sin is something that God offers through the power of grace, rather than through perfecting ones character and crossing off ones negative deeds.

One further difficulty regarding free will is the question of foreknowledge and the extent to which if God has foreknowledge and thus knew that Adam would disobey him, was Adam really responsible for disobeying God. And in relation to this, did Adam exercise an independent will or was he compelled by God? Likewise, if God had foreknowledge of Adams sin, was it not morally obligatory for God to prohibit Adam from disobedience and therefore save human beings from a sinful inheritance? Augustine's answer is in fact quite direct in that the existence of Gods foreknowledge of how events will be determined can also be seen independent of how human action is willed. For instance, he takes the example of happiness and states God's foreknowledge of your future happiness (which is certain even today) does not take away your will for happiness at the time when you begin to be happy.'[46] The same is true of sinful behaviour, God has foreknowledge of one's future sinful behaviour, but this doesn't stop you from desiring it, planning for it and willing it. Augustine's fundamental point

[45] Augustine, *Free Will* 108
[46] Ibid 78

is that God's foreknowledge of events and the necessity of those events taking place are distinct. This is because necessity requires some kind of agent that fulfils those demands otherwise there is incoherence. And since there is an agent that acts, it is only logical to see the will as a power inside of the agent.[47] Had God simply intervened at every juncture of moral evil then there would be little sense of reward and punishment for actions. He adds 'For if He ought not hand out punishments to sinners because He foresaw that they were going to sin, on that account neither should He hand out rewards to those who act rightly, since He foresaw nonetheless that they would act rightly'.[48] Furthermore, whether it is morally obligatory for God to intervene and his failure to do so is proof enough that 'God's providence is weak, or unjust, or evil'[49] which reveals an absence of God's justice in human affairs. Augustine doesn't produce a theodicy justifying God's perfection in the face of atrocity, but he does affirm a moral order in the universe. For Augustine, critics make the mistake of assuming that because there is goodness in the universe this automatically necessitates the absence of sin. He writes 'the presence of the greater does *not* result in the absence of the lesser' but instead 'the unhappiness you deplore also contributes to the perfection of the universe.'[50] This point still leaves unclear how sin can be justly punished if it contributes to the overall goodness in the universe. It may be taken to imply that those who commit sin be praised for their contribution to celestial harmony.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter of this was to introduce the Greco-Christian discourse on evil that subsequently exercised an enormous influence on Latin Christendom. We proceeded by showing that Plato and Plotinus' grounded the intelligibility of evil in terms of form and matter.

[47] Ibid 79
[48] Ibid 81
[49] Ibid 76
[50] Ibid 91

This distinction determined the nature of the discourse of evil until the reformation and the enlightenment. For Plato the forms are the starting place of the good, and evil is intelligible to the extent that the matter is moved away from the form or participates in it a limited way. This understanding of matter as evil is given a more robust metaphysical framework in the time of Plotinus. Indeed, Plotinus enunciates his own interpretation of evil as a privation of the good or being with a triune metaphysical system in which evil is understood as further away in distance from the One. Augustine in general adopts the sense of evil as negative, losing goodness and therefore losing reality. Evil is therefore the slow falling away from the perfection of 'form' or God's will that is identified with the good by Christians. This sense of the material or the temporal as something inferior but not unreal was adopted by Christianity, but with some important differences. Most significantly, Christian's would hesitate to say that matter was entirely evil or unreal. The *saeculum*, as understood by Augustine, meant there was a space for making good of the material world and as the route to human salvation. Importantly, Christianity introduced a range of other questions and problems regarding free will, divine justice and human sinfulness that were either never seriously considered or without significance for Platonists conceptions of evil. Therefore, although Augustine made creative use of the philosophical system of Platonism to ground evil, there was always the possibility for its overcoming. In particular, through the formulation of free will, this created the looming possibility of a struggle between human will and divine will. Something that was partly offset in the Middle Ages by the idea of human free will as moving teleologically to realise the intrinsic good in nature, until the reformers began to imagine a completely new idea of God and the application of free will to justify faith. Nevertheless, the form and matter distinction provided a robust way to conceptualise evil. Firstly, it created a strong connection between metaphysical, moral and natural evil, so that evils in the natural world i.e., famines, plagues or earthquakes were related to the formation of matter. Secondly, this point ought to be

emphasised, our most ‘folkish’ conceptualisations of evil as monsters, demons, evil spirits, and black magic, also thrives on this interpretation of matter being energised and manipulated by the power of forms.

2. The Reformation of Evil: Between Divine and Human Freedom

In this chapter, we shall examine the impact of the reformation in shaping the modern secular discourse of evil. This discourse is defined by a growing subjectivism in the conception of evil. Constitutive of this growing subjectivism is evil being identified closely with freedom, at first divine freedom and eventually human freedom. One of the outcomes of this growing subjectivism is the pluralisation of discourse, and what is perceived as the unintelligibility of evil. Contemporary scholarly debates on the nature and concept of evil are deeply divided over the moral content of evil or its basic motivations. And this is more generally related to contemporary moral disagreements over what it means to live a good life. Disagreement on the concept and nature of evil have their roots in the pluralisation of moral discourse that originates in theological and doctrinal questions first raised by Church reformers. More specifically, the robust metaphysical structure that grounded evil throughout antiquity *via* the 'form' and 'matter' comes to look increasingly vulnerable thanks to a nominalist critique of the metaphysical God and the reformers increasing anxiety over how they are going to be saved from sinfulness and evil by a God that looks increasingly remote and stands powerfully over the material world of man and nature.

What I hope this chapter reveals is the essential contribution of the reformation to the formation of the modern discourse of evil. Although the historical significance of the reformation is beyond doubt, how it transformed and propelled the discourse of evil towards secularity remains unrecognised. Of the recent works on the concept and problem of evil written by Susan Neiman, Andrew Delbanco, Richard Bernstein, Claudia Card, Peter Dew, or Roy Baumeister, for example, none really confront the historical impact of the reformation.[1]

[1] See Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought* (2002) Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan* (1995) Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, (New York, Polity 2002) Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2005) Peter Dew, *The Idea of Evil*, (London, Blackwell 2012) and Roy Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*, (Holt 2015)

The overwhelming picture is that of a modern discourse of evil created by the enlightenment and the secularisation of evil therefore comes through the elimination of religion, metaphysics and Christianity pushed by key enlightenment thinkers. Contrary to these standpoints, I believe we are best served at looking at the reformation as crucial in the *transition* and *transformation* of evil into secular modernity. Essential to this transformation is firstly, a new interpretation of God, thanks to nominalism, and secondly, the growing importance reformers assign to human freedom in taking responsibility for becoming justified before God. I will look to examine this transition and transformation through the lens of nominalism, the Christianisation of Satan and the individualisation of sin. What I hope the reformation reveals is that the grounding of evil in the form and matter distinction comes to be seen as a tussle oscillating between a new conception of God and human freedom. The reformations concept of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*, and the implementation of this faith through the exclusive application of scriptural commandments, *sola scriptura*, empowered believers not only to challenge or remove moral evil, but ultimately also to arrive at their own understanding of evil. Something that eventually led to an array of scepticism, doubt and disagreement over the intelligibility of evil; as many post-reformation thinkers began not only to doubt the Christian interpretation of evil but also whether Christianity was indeed the problem in making evil intelligible.

Therefore, it would be wrong to assume this pluralised discourse of evil emerges in opposition to European Christianity. Instead, the modern discourse of evil that is rooted in individual autonomy and human nature, is also entwined with the peculiar reformulation of Christianity into a *religion*, as opposed to its normative understanding and usage throughout the Middle Ages, as a form of holistic virtue or ethical practice that encompassed metaphysics, morality and politics. This incarnation of Christianity understood originally as moral virtue and then transformed into religion or religions, owes much to the reformers summons to *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* which turned Christianity into a faith that is rooted in the soul and is

politically held in an individual and private sphere of life. To clarify my general point, it is the reformation that energises the secularisation and pluralisation of evil. This is not to say, however, that reformers intentionally de-sacralised evil of its content. But rather, their reformulation of Christianity into a specific kind of religion (marked by faith, individualism, privatisation and a certain kind of textual fidelity [‘hermeneutics’]) had the effect of secularising this discourse.

This chapter will proceed along the following steps with the aim of making clear how the reformation plays a crucial role in the secularisation of evil: (i) we shall look at the reformation and the kind of religion that was practiced by medieval believers prior to the reformation; (ii) the significance of nominalism as a creating a very different understanding of God that undermines the form and matter grounding of evil; (iii) the reformation of evil through showing that reformers fundamental commitment to scripture contributes to a very different interpretations of Satan and sin. The general trajectory of the reformation of evil is towards a very pluralist and individualised notion of Satan and sin respectively, and more significantly it is up to human freedom to wrestle with Satan as it is to free oneself of sin in order to affirm true Christian faith.

The Reformation: The Anxiety of Good and Evil

According to Peter Wallace ‘recent reinterpretations of the European Reformation have challenged the decadent image of late medieval Christianity, the ability of the reformers to distance themselves from earlier patterns of belief, and the success of the reformers in indoctrinating their religious values into the hearts and minds of their followers.’[2] As a result of this mushrooming scholarship, new research has turned away from the image of a singular largely Protestant and German reformation. In its place, we have a plurality of reformations.[3]

[2] Peter Wallace, *The Long European Reformation*: *Religion, Political Conflict, and the Search for Conformity 1350-1750* (New York, Macmillan 2004) 6
[3] See George Williams, *The Radical Reformation* 3rd ed. (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press 2000)

These include traditional magisterial reformers like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. In addition to these are radical reformers like Thomas Münzter who believed Church reform ought to be only the starting point of a more comprehensive social and political reform programme. Just as important is the work of Catholic reformers like Suárez and others whose collective efforts are unfairly described as the counter-reformation but belong to a singular effort to purge and purify the Church, the Christian faith, and to make both conform to the commandments of the Gospel. Furthermore, the new research has also forced us to reconsider the historical periodisation of the reformation. Rather than see it conclude at Trent (1545) or Augsburg (1555), Gorski has helpfully divided the reformation into three phases. One that begins with an emergent phase 1517-1525, an intermediary radical phase 1520-1545 and finally a confessional phase that lasts from 1540 to 1648.[4] Gorski timeline is useful, but it excludes concerted attempts to reform the (Roman) Church and society that had been going on for several centuries prior to Luther, Suàrez and Müntzer respectively. Both Wallace and more recently Taylor trace the efforts to reform the church to a much longer genealogy.

What drove intermittent theological disputations into something that halted centuries of moral agreement, was the simple need to identify what it means to be a good Christian, who has the authority to define this good. Luther challenged the authority of the Church to identify what it means to be Christian, and with it their interpretation of the good. In numerous polemical tracts and thesis's, the Church was accused of happily turning over the binding authority of the Gospel, specifically Jesus's teachings and Gospel commandments, and in its place promoting Church tradition in the form of sacramental rites, scholastic theology, papal bulls, canon laws and folk superstitions which cemented its political authority by enriching its treasury. Luther's and the critiques of subsequent reformers was therefore both moral and

[4] See Philip Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe,* (Chicago, Chicago University Press 2004) Introduction and Chapter 1

theological. There was an irrevocable connection between practices and idolatrous beliefs of the Church and the inability of the Roman clergy to properly exemplify the Christian good and transmit this to society.

Let us consider a little, the nature of the good that Luther and subsequent reformers felt was not being realised and creating a distorted image of Christianity. The construal of medieval Christianity in its institutionalised or regional variations was virtue-laden and tied to a teleological notion of the good. According to Brad Gregory

> Christianity on the eve of the Reformation entailed an eternally ramifying ethical discourse based on metaphysics that was disclosed through a history and embedded within a politics. With its teleological ethics rooted in God's self-revelation through his creation and his covenant with Israel, above all in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, medieval Christianity involved reciprocally related moral rules, the practice of moral virtues, and a moral community –the church–all of which were supposed to foster the common good and the salvation of souls.[5]

Indispensable to the medieval Christian vision of integrated individual and communal flourishing was the internalisation of moral virtues and avoidance of moral vices. The moral system of medieval Christianity was delimited by the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, anger, avarice, gluttony, sloth and lechery. It followed from this conception that the movement towards the human good and *telos* could not be realised if individuals had not learnt to exercise mastery over their moral vices. Similarly, the exercise of Christian virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope and charity were applied individually and communally to the variegated complexities of human life in order to prepare for the *beatitudo* with the saints and God in heaven. The instrument for this message was the Church, symbolising the temporal good whilst disseminating and implementing Christian virtues into the souls of individuals and the life blood of the community.

[5] Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularised Society*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press 2012) 190

This presentation of moral uniformity in medieval Christianity is undoubtedly simplistic. Particularly, when considering the periodic episodes of violence and almost cyclical attempts to reform the community and the Church prior to the reformation. However, it is fair to say that there existed an 'ideal' of encompassing or holistic Christendom, combining metaphysics with an ethical discourse, and which provided regulations and a stable identification on how to live a morally praiseworthy and virtuous Christian life. Furthermore, the medieval understanding of evil was also bound to the notion of a specifically Christian good outlined here. What was convincing and lasting about the Augustine-Platonic thesis on evil was how it was enfolded within a meaningful and purposeful order, in which the actions of the individual had a deeper significance thanks to an innate rationality within nature. Ancient philosophy in general did not assign any metaphysical significance to the creation of human beings, or the natural world generally, its purpose was predetermined and tied to the natural cycle of degeneration and corruption that gave birth to another cycle. However, Christianity's radically new message of redemption placed humanity at the centre of creation. Christ represented the victory over evil, and thus offered humanity hope that there was a special purpose and *telos* to life, so long as human beings used their God given freedom to live virtuously in pursuit of the good and the Kingdom of God. The temporal exemplification of this *telos* was the Church, and its purpose was to keep itself free of sinfulness and provide a model for a moral community of the good. Philosophically, this was supported by a common understanding of the good intrinsic in human nature that simply needed realising.

As we have noted already, the moral economy of faith and works was one of the ways in which God's will and intention could be filtered down to creation. This underpinned the nature-grace synthesis, meaning morally praiseworthy acts deserved to be merited and immoral or sinful acts deserved punishment. The necessity of works for salvation, thus gave a certain stability and uniformity to the understanding of evil. However, in relating sacramental rites to

the immorality inside the church; Luther was able to raise more serious questions on the meaning of the Christian good and the Church's authority to define it. To be clear, Luther didn't intend to jettison the metaphysical suppositions of the Christian good, but to make sure moral practices and moral relationships conformed consistently to the good found within the Gospel. Individuals didn't become righteous through an inherent *telos* to the good in nature which the Church brought out through the performance of sacraments or other praiseworthy works, but because God willed it and bequeathed grace freely. According to Harrison 'Moral worth was to be understood relationally, rather than ontologically.'[6] Therefore, in questioning the relationship between faith and works, and relating the good to Individual faith and personal interpretation of scripture, Luther had introduced greater autonomy and hence innumerable possible permutations of the good. Not only is the moral good in this way exposed to its radical subjectivisation, pluralisation and autonomisation by subsequent reformers and even sceptical thinkers, but it also plunges the concept and nature of evil into doubt because there is no trustworthy body to define the good or there is nothing in nature that is good.

Luther and subsequent reformers tried to control the possibility of plural interpretations of the good and therefore the plural interpretations of evil through two means. The first pillar of reformed theology is the centrality of *faith* as salvation from human sinfulness. Both Luther and Calvin extracted the principle of faith from a Pauline-Augustinian reading of grace, as a gift given freely by God. In *The Freedom of the Christian*, Luther had stated that 'The soul receives no help from any work connected with the body'[7] and thus only 'true faith in Christ is an incomparable treasure that brings a person complete salvation and deliverance from all evil.'[8] Likewise, in Calvin the conversion out of sin into righteousness proceeds not from any

[6] Peter Harrison, "Science and Secularization", *Intellectual History Review*, Vol 27, No 1 (2017) 57
[7] Martin Luther's, *Basic Theological Writings*, ed Timothy F Lull and William Russell (Minnesota, Fortress Press) 2012, 405
[8] Ibid 406

individual merit but faith 'converted solely by the power of God.'[9] Both Luther and Calvin had placed the economy of salvation beyond the power of intercessionary authorities, and therefore the moral economy of faith and works. In practice, faith alone: no matter how sincerely held, also made moral values, meanings and practices deeply contingent on God's free will. While the moral good of Christ's salvific role was never disputed by reformers; placing the believers' faith at the centre, also made the meaning of Christ's sacrifice and how this meaning was articulated within a moral community, subject to an open-ended pluralism. Faith alone couldn't produce a moral community in which there was consensus over how salvation was related to the rest of God's commandments; evidenced by the proliferations of confessions, sectarians and other splinter groups that helped to fuel the wars of religion throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The second pillar of reformed theology is *solar scriptura* which effectively meant supreme authority belonged to the *Bible* over the church tradition. Although scripture was essential to medieval liturgy, it was applied in a fragmented way (and according to the needs of a rite)[10] rather than read or implemented holistically. Luther, who spent his entire academic career as a Biblical lecturer, was also influenced by humanist philology and its mission of going beyond glossarial comments and *uncovering the original meaning* of the text. The influence of humanism on subsequent reformers also contributed to the shift away from the seven deadly sins, instead emphasising the Ten Commandments, as the guiding moral framework to be applied into the life of every Christian but also expressing the rule-bound morality of the reformers more generally.[11] Again, scriptural readings, failed to yield certainty over how a reformed church would include God's commandments as the grounds for a unified moral

[9] John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, translator Henry Beveridge (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids 2002) 193
[10] See Bryan Spinks' *The Bible in liturgy and worship 1500-1750*, pp 563-578 in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* ed Euan Cameron (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2016)
[11] See John Bossy, *Christianity In The West:*1400-1700 (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1985) Chapter Seven

community. While Lutherans, Calvinist's and Anabaptist communities, agreed on the supremacy of *sola scriptura*, precisely because it conceived its aim as the recovery of an original meaning, this also radicalised and multiplied theologically disagreement, whether over the meaning of infant baptism or the scriptural proof for the Eucharist. The situation was magnified by the printing revolution which drove the Bible's message to newer communities, reading publics and which in turn created different scriptural disagreements. Hence the insistence on *sola scriptura* made it difficult to discern what virtuous Christian behaviour meant in practice, given it effectively yielded not an exact original meaning but an endless plurality of scriptural readings and diverse moral possibilities.

Peter Berger believes the reformation contributes to the loss of the 'plausibility structure'[12] that had protected the subjective reality of religion, the result of this loss is it 'plunges religion into a crisis of identity.'[13] This crisis of identity maybe understood as the relocation of authority that empowers God and also throws the responsibility on radically sinful human being to become worthy of God's grace, and not simply expect the inherent goodness in nature to lead them towards goodness. While *sola scriptura* gave every believer the autonomy to read, interpret and implement the meaning of God's commandments, it also undermined the possibility of a shared moral and theological understanding of scripture. Moreover, how could a consensus over the meaning of the Ten Commandments arise with the reformers insistence that human understanding was irreparably corrupted by the fall? Without a unifying ecclesiastical authority or consensus on the meaning of the scriptural tradition, this created the grounds for sterile intellectual passivity and agnosticism. Empirical investigation was not yet secure enough to decide or forgo the relationship between moral and natural evil. Faith alone was little help in rationalising why God allowed summer rains to destroy crops and let millions

[12] Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, (London, Collins 1980) 127
[13] Ibid 151

of believing Christians suffer. Yet neither did the conflicts between Catholics and Protestant settle matters. Thanks to the reformers the meaning of evil was increasingly personal, subjective and not grounded in anything as resilient as a shared idea of God let alone the meaning of Gods actions.

Medieval Crisis: God's Freedom and Justification

In the foregoing we have tried to show the reformulation of Christianity from a religious community dedicated to a holistic notion of the moral good in which the implementation and practise of virtue integrates the temporal and spiritual in the service of the good, to a *religion* that is dedicated to the good but whose understanding of this good is personal, individual, textual, rule-bound and increasingly cornered to a de-politicised sphere of life. The secularisation of evil, which shall be explored under the heading 'the Reformation of Evil' is a reflex of this reformulation of Christianity and as a result opens onto a sense of evil as personal, subjective, individual and moral. Contemporary moral disagreements over 'the unintelligibility of evil' or 'the incomprehensibility' owe their genesis, I believe to the reformation and the impact of intellectual plurality.

What is important to note is the change introduced by the reformers was a symptom of a broader intellectual change, responsible for the anxiety plaguing many believers over whether they were 'justified' before God or if their prayers were going to be accepted. To understand the reformation and the drift towards individualism in belief we need to look at philosophical nominalism and its contribution to a concept of God defined by will as opposed to limited by goodness in nature.

Very briefly, Christian theology had undergone a significant systematisation thanks to the transmission and translation of Aristotle into thirteenth century Europe. Catholic doctrines were synthesised with Aristotelian categories into a form of 'ontological realism.'[14] That is,

[14] Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2008) 14

categories of human experience could be seen as 'the instantiation of the categories of divine reason.'[15] Thus categories like 'good' or 'justice' had a universal reality behind them and their usage in society reflected these universal essences. Under the influence of Aquinas, the most important of these universals was 'the light of reason' which he compared to 'a likeness of the uncreated truth dwelling in us.'[16] Significantly, the fact that human beings shared reason with God also meant that God's intention and actions were intelligible to human understanding. The realm of nature contained intrinsic qualities or power so that medieval Christians could discern the workings of grace from performing sacraments, penance or other righteous works. The Aristotelian synthesis therefore reinforced the privation theory of evil. The natural *telos* of man was towards the good, meaning that evil and sin were understood as deviations from true nature as opposed to something real.

What challenged this medieval synthesis of Aristotelian-Catholic realism was the growth of nominalism in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. This presented a very different interpretation of God and a very different understanding of how believers would relate to a God that was not limited to aiding human beings to find the good intrinsic to nature or upholding the good generally. Although nominalism is probably best understood as a loose philosophical movement, it is traditionally understood as rejecting universals for individual categories to comprehend objects. Therefore, Plato's forms or the Aristotelian form and matter as universal categories were rejected after coming under severe criticism by nominalists. The overriding concern of nominalists like Duns Scotus, was not whether God was good or God acted according to natural reason, but the overriding importance of God's inscrutable free will. For Scotus, realism limited divine omnipotence, meaning that 'if universals did exist, God would not be able to destroy any instance of it without destroying the universal.'[17] This was in contrast

[15] Ibid
[16] Peter Harrison, *Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2007) 43
[17] Gillespie, *Theological Origins* 22

to nominalism's omnipotent God which was not limited by the law of reason, and as such not compelled to act consistently with universal categories and therefore the moral good revealed by nature. Intellectual categories were rooted in God's creative will and therefore emancipated by the meaning derived from an immutable law of reason that determined nature. The meaning of things was dependent on God's omnipotent free will. As the greatest being in the cosmos, standing above nature; nominalism empowered God to reshape nature and reason to its own will.

According to Gillespie nominalism contributed to 'an ontological revolution that called being itself into question…it thus gave rise to a new ontology, a new logic, and a new conception of man, God, and nature.'[18] By removing a universal immutable order, all that could be posited was the existence of individual entities created by the independent will of God. Significantly, the image of God whose actions are ultimately inscrutable offered little chance to the intelligibility or contentment over the righteousness of one's works.

Indeed, without a natural order of things, good and thus evil was left to the inscrutable will of God. In theory, a God that was utterly free, was also free to reward the sinful and to tyrannise the virtuous. A free God was under no obligation to accept the prayers, penance or confessions of the faithful. In broader terms, it also meant that evil wasn't a negation of being-good, since goodness now depended upon the free and contingent will of God. Nominalism therefore contributes to a profound distancing between God and creation that is brought out by reformers. Medieval theology controlled this distance through the economy of nature and grace, so that the inherent goodness in nature made it easier for human beings to receive grace and redeem themselves from sin. However, nominalism made nature more dependent on God's supreme will, without any intrinsic good or power in nature that the *telos* would try to bring out. Subsequent reformers radicalised the sacramental understanding of nature and grace also

[18] Ibid 16

meaning that the idea of matter was one that was also far more contingent on God's radical free will. In other words, if every act was individual, what were the grounds for separating the morally praiseworthy from morally evil ones? God's freedom thus creates a perpetual anxiety within believers, uncertain over the moral worthiness of themselves or how to evaluate their actions in lieu of the silence of heaven and the incomprehensibility of nature. This general shift in mood is also critical to creating the grounds for the secular indifference towards the specifically Christian God in general.

It follows the natural order and cosmos ceases to look ordered by a benevolent God at the centre, motivated by divine justice and who acts consistently, and according to a good in nature that all human beings could make intelligible. Instead, it takes the form of radical contingency, that is without a natural order of things, meaning that good and evil were left to the inscrutable will of God. It was therefore sheer speculation that because God created nature, this nature was blessed with power that was in turn created for the intention of realising the good. God's 'real' intention with respect to nature were unknowable, meaning what deductions we could make based on observing the relationship between God's radically free will and the natural world, involved imposing one's own individual prejudices. Therefore, believers were always haunted by the possibility that any relationship between virtue and goodness they may have noticed or logically deduced was either subjective or could be overturned at a moment's notice. God offered guidance through revelation, but there was no definite sense what this meant, or indeed, the extent to which God was responsible to its own commands. The result for the believer was the relationship to God was defined by increasing uncertainty over the worthiness of one's actions and the self-confidence that one's actions were praiseworthy.

Nominalism therefore overturns the seamlessness of this relationship by which God relates to believers through reason, nature and works. God's unlimited power changed the rules of the game because in theory God could suddenly decide that salvation was no longer humanity's

final goal. God was free to break a promise because God's 'choices are groundless, hence unknowable, and therefore unpredictable.'[19] Divine autonomy created a spectre of perpetual anxiety for believers unsure over what they could do to save themselves. If divine justice was independent of the moral good, human actions seemed to be meaningless.

We can gauge the impact of nominalism upon evil through the doctrine of justification. In English, the term 'justification' takes on the Old Testament notion of being 'right before God.'[20] Therefore to be justified is to feel at ease, to know that one's relationship with God is righteous. A righteous person is not certain of salvation but assured that their actions and motivations are correct. The Catholic doctrine of grace reinforced one's feelings of righteousness through the performance of moral virtues, sacramental rites, all rooted in a benevolent nature. Therefore, the hope for salvation through grace was reasonable. Whilst salvation was something that was attained by divine grace, the unknowability of grace was mediated by balancing revelation with the divine reason bestowed by God. In other words, to offset the anxiety of inherent sinfulness: the economy of salvation was pushed through the sacraments and by avoiding the 'seven deadly sins' which afforded ethical certainty and stability toward becoming justified before God. This moral economy of faith and works was one of the ways in which God's will could be filtered down to creation. Morally praiseworthy acts could be known through human reason, and in theory, the necessity of works for salvation and the ethical system of the 'seven deadly sins' gave a certain stability to understanding one's own righteousness before God.

However, if God is unlimited and free to do anything, then becoming justified before God is problematic. Luther's spiritual crisis was prompted by his feeling of unworthiness before this radically free God bequeathed by nominalism and therefore a failure to know whether he

[19] Michael Gillespie, "Where Did All the Evils," in *Naming Evil: Judging Evil* ed Ruth Grant (Chicago, Chicago University Press 2006) 22
[20] Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell 1988) 88

was a righteous Christian, a sinner destined for hell or someone saved by God's grace thanks in part to his actions. It is worth pointing out that Luther was educated at the nominalist, University of Erfurt (1501-1505) and then St Augustine's Monastery also in Erfurt. Although Luther's relationship to nominalism is complicated, in *The Bondage of the Will*, he typically affirms a radically omnipotent God by describing God as 'not bound himself by his word, but has kept himself free over all things.'[21] Yet, Luther's God of limitless will had also turned evil into something left over from its freedom. If God was not bound by the word, then how did one understand the nature of evil? Evil that is more directly related to Gods inscrutable will, also created an enormous space for human speculation of the meaning of God's actions, whilst at the same time causing profounder disagreement over the nature of evil relative to God's actions. Positing an omnipotent divine will, like a sovereign human will, also puts forward the possibility that God is both good and evil, as opposed to the Good-Being of the Platonic-Christian conceptualisation of Christianity.

Augustine's influence on Luther was significant for instilling a critical standpoint towards the optimistic Aristotelian claim that human nature had a *telos* to the good. Luther preferred a radical interpretation of sin that was more insidiously placed within the entirety of nature. In 1516 Luther writes of his discovery of Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings,[22] prior to this, Luther remained committed to the medieval catalogue of the seven deadly sins. Luther's main focus shifted to the effect of aversion to God, which, as an active act of will in reality and not just as a possibility, led people to turn to created things. Luther defined the primary effect as being bent toward oneself (*incurvatio in se ipsum*).[23] Sin comes down to perversity within the

[21] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* in *Martin Luther's, Basic Theological Writings*, ed by Timothy Lull and William Russell, (Minneapolis, Fortress 2012) pp 139-140 and also William Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence* (Westminster, John Knox Press 1996) 48
[22] Batka, L'ubomír. "Luther's Teaching on Sin and Evil," In *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed Robert Kolb Irene Dingel and L'ubomir Batka (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014) 239
[23] Ibid 237

person with the exclusion of all their good deeds done individually or indeed collectively. Luther makes this very clear in the following statement:

> The intellect is so darkened that we can no longer understand God and his will, nor perceive nor acknowledge the works of God. Moreover the will is so wonderfully depraved that we cannot trust in the mercy of God nor fear God, but living in security and unconcern, we disregard the Word of God and his will and follow the concupiscence and violent lusts of the flesh. The conscience also is no longer at peace and in quiet, and when it thinks of the judgments of God it sinks into despair, and seeks and follows after unlawful supports and remedies.[24]

The overriding struggle is inside of the individual and the depravity that has seeped inside one's characters is reinforced by the depravity in the material world. Adams fall into disobedience had fundamentally overturned the spirit that was behind the lack of faith. Luther is also devaluing natural world by illustrating its fallenness and casting nature in a negative light, as opposed to its conventional identification with reason.

Luther's understanding of sin was also influenced by the hermeneutics of humanist textual scholarship, which gradually placed human authority for the understanding of scripture above that of the cumulative tradition. Ostensibly, the problem was this new authority rested on a sinful and depraved human conscience for its elucidation. This was hardly a sustainable or a convincing solution to the problem of sinfulness and the fallen-ness of nature, and simply gave way to numerous permutations of human nature from the complete denial of human nature or equally its predetermined sinfulness. If evil is directly related to Gods inscrutable will and the final hermeneutical authority is a depraved sinful human nature, this created an enormous space for human speculation and uncertainty over the meaning of God's actions, whilst at the same time causing profounder disagreement over the nature of evil relative to God's actions and human authority to define God's action.

[24] Martin Luther, Luther's Genesis Commentary Chapter Two in *Everyone's Luther* trans from John Nicholas Lenker pp 83-4

What made the intelligibility of evil even more problematic was the Church as guardians of the good were not immune from the fallenness in the material world. Briefly stated, the Church offered the sale of indulgences to offset the anxiety of sinfulness and the hope it would lessen the punishment of sinners before God. Indulgences, however, grew into a lucrative enterprise, and with it followed accusations of financial abuse. The nub of Luther's criticisms are made clear in his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) where he writes 'To trust in works, which one ought to do in fear, is equivalent to giving oneself the honor and taking it from God.'[25] For Luther, the economy of salvation practised by the Church rested on a idolatrous self-belief that it was through human intervention and not through divine omnipotence that the sinful are saved from evil. The intense practice of virtuous behaviour had nothing to do with offsetting evil within individuals of community; its appearance was always contingent to God's freedom. More than this, it was also evidence that evil was perversely internal to the good and not its privation. If evil, sinfulness and corruption could reach the Roman church, the citadel of Christianity, then no sphere of life was really free of evil and as such revealed the brokenness of nature.

Luther's lasting theological contribution of justification by faith seems to hold at bay the radical consequences of nominalism. Luther replaces the old economy of salvation through works with one centred on faith. In the *Freedom of the Christian*, Luther insists that 'true faith in Christ is an incomparable treasure that brings a person complete salvation and deliverance from all evil.[26] Luther's intention therefore wasn't to jettison the Christian understanding of the good works, but instead to make sure moral practices conform to the commandments of the Gospel and a life dedicated to Christ. Yet Luther's own economy of salvation leaves believers with little clarity over how to understand evil, or indeed how best to respond to it. If the slow disciplining of pride or envy through habituating virtuous Christian behaviour did not

[25] Ibid 18
[26] Luther, *Basic Theological Writings* 406

contribute to removing the radical sinfulness in nature, (or even within Christian communities) because evil has nothing to do with human will, but is affected by God's sanctifying grace being thrown collectively upon the sinful, how could there be any need or motivation to seek out goodness or to implement practical modification of the passions to tame their sinfulness? One of the criticisms raised by radical reformers of Luther's faith was it didn't pay serious attention to the practical circumstances in which faith is gained and preserved. In other words, faith was just as complicit in reproducing more evil and more cruelty, serving a useful cover for political power, financial immodesty and greed, which in turn served to produce more violence, more war and more cruelty.[27]

To summarise briefly, the aim of this section was to explain one of intellectual causes behind the reformation as the nominalist revolution which brought forth a new interpretation of God. This causes a re-evaluation of the relationship between God, man and nature and the increasing questioning of the 'form' and 'matter' dichotomy. God stands powerfully over creation and whose exact relationship to creation is unknown because of God's unlimited freedom. For believers it was impossible to know the real intentions of an absolutist God, and this created an equal amount of speculation and scepticism towards one's own righteousness in practice and in faith. The main result of the reformation for the intelligibility of evil is investing good and evil in the will of an omnipotent God, in other words evil becomes identified with freedom, firstly God but in subsequent centuries by human freedom. This creates greater doubt thanks to plurality of interpretations of the good, firstly because nature is fallen and not destined for the good and secondly, because believers are also empowered to think having faith and scripture will save them from the devil or sinfulness. This good that could in theory be taught by the Catholic church, Luther's conviction in faith alone, Calvin's doctrine of election, Anabaptist community of good's or Müntzer's revolutionary eschatological. The plurality of

[27] Wu Ming, *Thomas Müntzer: Sermon to the Princes*, trans Michael Baylor (London Verso 2010) see Chapter 4

opinions over what is good practice or faith creates doubt over the nature or origin of evil. It is to some of these difficulties that we turn to in this next section.

The Reformation of Evil: Satan and Sin

In this final section, I shall look at two familiar understandings of evil that are reformulated during the reformation: Satan and sin. Both seem to undergo transformation that are marked by plurality and individualism. To be clear, this not an exhaustive summary, but an attempt to offer the general outline of what happened to evil thanks to the reformers conviction that the Christian good had to be defined by a radically personal faith (*sola fide*) and commitment to truthfulness of scripture applied to every aspect of life (*sola fide*). What I hope to show in this section is that this new interpretation of God as the absolute power in the universe also contributed to a sense in which human beings were thrown back upon their own resources and expected to become responsible for the purity of their own faith. This sense of individual responsibility is the biggest factor in the secularisation of evil and it derives from the reformations conviction that human beings have to do all they can to become justified and therefore worthy of grace.

Although reformers insistence on faith provided the potential for unifying the community around a common understanding of Christian religion; forgoing moral practices or sacramental rites also created a relentless tumbling toward moral subjectivism, with believers unsure how to interpret God's actions or certainty what moral life in practise meant. Religious communities powered with the gift of reading scripture increasingly self-defined their faith as infallible and the others faith as dispensable and even satanic. While Anabaptists may have shared the centrality of the Ten Commandments with Lutherans, the differences over infant baptism made a shared Christian community of goods impossible. Hence existing social and political tensions quickly morphed into episodes of 'religious' violence. According to Brad Gregory 'the Reformation's much greater success ended more than a thousand years of efforts in the Latin

West to create a unified moral community through Christianity.'[28] No grand community emerged, despite the reformers using faith as a vehicle for Christianising society. Instead, Europe spent a lot of the sixteenth drifting from the 'wars of Religion' to inquisitions and burning 'witches.'

The general trajectory of evil therefore follows the general pattern of the reformation and migrates from a communal and collective struggle into a singular and personal battle against Satan, and therefore something resembling a war against the self that is magnified by a radically sinful interpretation of human nature. We shall endeavour to delineate this trajectory through the changing face of Satan, and additionally the overriding significance reformers assigned to human sinfulness, to the extent that human beings are culpable for sinfulness and what they ought to do in order to remove sinfulness from self and society. To repeat my point, I believe this contributes to individualism with respect to becoming responsible for evil and therefore pluralism in terms of how evil is received.

We can see the dynamic of individualism and pluralism in the intelligibility of evil through the figure of Satan. Carlos Eire pointed out that the 'Christian devil was an amalgam of ancient near eastern and European folklore, and since much of demonological lore was extrabiblical, clear definitions did not begin to emerge until the fifteenth century.'[29] The literary or artistic representations of Satan as a beast marked by horns, wings, tailed and fire is therefore a cultural illustration. For instance, in the Torah, Satan is construed as an opponent of God, rather than a malevolent force wrapped with serpentine energy which appears in the Gospel. Ideally, what reformers hoped for was a singular Satan that acted and represented evil like the Satan of scripture. Zwingli, the Swiss reformer declared "no such trust should be given to any word like that given to [the word of God]. For it is certain [*gewub*] and may not fail. It is clear [*heiter*],

[28] Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* 203
[29] Carlos Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven, Yale University Press 2016) 620

and will not leave us to err in darkness. It teaches itself on its own [*es leert sich selbs*]."[30] Therefore, essential to grounding the intelligibility of Satan's evil was recognising the supremacy of scripture over the Church tradition. However, what the reformation helped to produce was a more nuanced and contested understanding of Satan.

The 'scriptualisation' of Satan is better understood through to the reformers creative dialogue with the Genesis narrative. According to Christopher Hill 'The Fall was central to seventeenth-century debates about the nature of the state and its laws, as well as about the justification of private property, social inequality and the subordination of women.'[31] The seventeenth century, however, took its inspiration from the sixteenth. Luther as a Biblical scholar wrote and lectured extensively on Genesis. The same is true of Calvin. Their interpretation of a radical sinfulness created by the Fall was self-consciously directed at the satanic influences that had taken hold of the Roman church and thus needed realignment to biblical Christianity. The popular identification of Satan and evil owes much to the reformers determined efforts to read the major themes of Genesis: disobedience, pride and original sin, into their own cosmic struggle with the Church or opponents within their own churches. As a result, the figure of Satan, who had remained peripheral in Judaic and even early Christian commentaries, came to stand for the personification of evil. According to Luther's intellectual biographer Hieko Oberman, we cannot possibly make sense of Luther's theology without his personal struggle with Satan.

> Luther's world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon only his faith in Christ retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real to him one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end. To argue that Luther never overcame the medieval belief in the Devil says far too little; he even intensified it and lent to it additional urgency: Christ and Satan wage a cosmic mastery over Church and world.[32]

[30] Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* 87
[31] Christopher Hill, *Sin and Society*, in his *Religion and Politics in Seventeenth Century England* (University of Massachusetts Press 1987) 125
[32] Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New York, N.Y: Image Books 1992) 104

On the back of this some historians have used the reformation to signify 'an age of devils' whence Europe's 'inner demons' were allowed to roam free.[33] The difficulty created by reformers was that basing the satanic upon scripture provided no decisive meaning of either Satan or evil. Therefore, a shared commitment to *sola scriptura* didn't entail a uniform understanding of Satan. Instead, the different and oppositional hermeneutical strategies adopted by Anabaptist, Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics created a dramatically pluralised understanding of the meaning of Satan and what kind of works signified and pointed to satanic evil.

This lack of consensus over the actions of Satan or who in fact were his minions is clear in the satanisation of any folk beliefs, witchcraft and magic that looked remotely pagan or idolatrous. Indeed, witchcraft practices were quickly identified by reformers as revealing the insidious reaches of Satan in social practices. Russell writes: 'witches were people who had formally given themselves to the Devil by making a pact with him: in return for their service, Satan rewarded them with magical powers, which they used for evil purposes.'[34] In reality, witchcraft was nothing more insidious than entrenched folk practices of pre-Christian practices like healing that failed assimilate to the new religious orthodoxies. Their manipulation of nature seemed to conform to the reformers conviction of nature as fallen and without any innate predisposition to the good. The repression of witchcraft went alongside the massive growth of 'demonological' literature that identified witches and their unchristian practices. Compendiums like Heinrich Krammer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), Heinrich Bullinger *Von Hexen* ("On witches"), Jean Bodin *Démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) and the *Daemonologie* written by King James VI of Scotland (1597) also criminalised the unorthodox religious ideas.

[33] Carlos Eire, *European Reformation*, Chapter 23 and Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (London, Pimlico 1993)
[34] Jeffery Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (New York, Cornell University Press 1986) 28

From the 1570's Lutheran, Calvinist and Catholic put to death thousands of innocent women, men and children suspected of dabbling in unorthodox practices and therefore in league with the Satan.

The violence against witches or generally the satanisation of practices that were considered non-Christian and idolatrous reveals the difficulty of basing Satan and satanic evil on scripture. That is, basing Satanic evil upon scripture provided no definite meaning of either Satan or evil. Additionally, this interpretive plurality paved the way for a subjective understanding of the role and purpose of Satan within society or the church to eventually replace a metaphysical one. One indicator of the changing face of Satan is in Calvin's commentary on Genesis. Calvin see's the fault-line not between God and Satan, but instead pleads 'Satan to be the real enemy of the human race, the contriver of all evils, furnished with every kind of fraud and villainy to injure and destroy.'[35] The responsibility for battling the Satan fell upon everyone of the 'priesthood of the believers.' Burton observes that with the reformation 'the theatre in which good struggles against evil is no longer the halls of heaven or the pit of hell: it is the human heart. And not so much the heart of the Christian community as the heart of the individual standing alone with his God – and his Satan.'[36] The insistence on faith before works placed the responsibility for combatting Satan exclusively upon the individual to examine signs of his influence as weakness, immorality or corruption inside the soul.

Finally, out of the crucible of doctrinal interpretations of Satan as an immutable foe of creation by Luther, Calvin and Müntzer also grew a Faustian tradition. In the works of Marlowe Shakespeare and later Milton, Satan was humanised, and his inner moral psychology was a subject worthy of investigation. Subsequent thinkers who had to confront the reformers immense shrinkage of supernatural reality did so by therefore imagining Satan locked into a

[35] John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids) 92
[36] Burton, *Mephistopheles* 76

universe determined increasingly by natural causes. Hence, Satan's rebelliousness, his individualism was a means to resolve his inner moral conflicts; this resonated in an age when medieval virtue was coming under attack from the newer virtues of greater moral and political autonomy. Insistence on faith or the priesthood of all believers opened up rival and varied secular interpretations of the cause of Satan's evil, the motivations behind his action and the culpability of Satan before God's radical freedom. To reiterate more generally, the reformers insistence on *sola scriptura* also led to a heterogeneous and pluralised understanding of Satan and satanic evil itself.

The reformers anxiety over battling Satan went together with the belief that human nature was radically sinful. In the Gospel, sinful action was measured in relation to a person's dis/obedience to God's law. How to understand sinfulness was interpreted very differently by medieval society. The context of medieval Christian ethics were virtue-laden meaning that 'sin was regarded as a visible and social matter, something which had to be forgiven in a visible and social way'[37] and thus 'sin was a state of offence inhering in communities rather than individuals, and may have reflected the gospel injunction 'tell the church' if their brothers had offended against them.'[38] Therefore, the state of remaining within sin was mediated through performing sacraments which led a person out of sin and towards righteousness. Bossy writes 'the sacrament represented a moment of critical transition: for the community and for the individual, a passage from a baptised but sinful condition into a supernatural state of 'grace', a passage from particularity towards membership of the whole body of Christ, a reconciliation to God and the neighbour.'[39] Additionally the economy of faith and works through the sacraments offered a path by which God's will was filtered down into creation because the sacraments contained an invisible power capable of changing human nature and impacting the

[37] McGrath, *Reformation Thought* 102
[38] John Bossy, *Christianity in the West* 47
[39] Ibid 46

physical environment. Carlos Eire writes that "Masses known as "votive" could be offered to ward off or correct as many ills as can befall the human race: to protect crops from hail, to be spared by plagues, to prevent evil thoughts or lust, and even to help find lost objects."[40] In this sense, sacraments or works upheld the connection between metaphysical, moral and natural evil. That is, sinful and immoral behaviour could explain God's punishment of humanity. Alternatively, the performance of praiseworthy works could be used to persuade God to forgive one for sinfulness within the community.

This is very different to what we get with Protestantism, whereby 'the sense of sin is internalised. Priestly mediators were discarded because each believer had a priest in his own conscience: outward penance and absolution was replaced by inward penance.'[41] What motivated Luther's protest was the sinfulness of trying to persuade God through the payment of indulgences in order to earn God's favour. Ostensibly, it brought to view the possibility that sinfulness was more perverse, given it had penetrated the Church, meaning also the behaviours of the Church's good works were simply not intrinsic to nature. Moreover, his criticism of the Church contributed to the sense in which the Church alone was no longer competent in defining the good. In his treatise, *On Secular Authority*, Luther argued that all humans belonged to two respective kingdoms, each with discrete sovereign demands: 'Secular government has laws that extend no further than the body, goods and whatever is external on earth. But God cannot and will not allow anyone but himself alone to rule over the soul.'[42] Effectively, Luther's pronouncement gave secular rulers the power to define the public good and the duty of good Christians was to obey secular definitions of the good. Believers gained autonomy over their religious lives so long as private religion didn't transgress what the rulers defined as political or social good. The growing autonomy of the political did not immediately relegate the moral

[40] Carlos Eire, *Reformations* 28
[41] Christopher Hill, *Sin* 152
[42] Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* 147

good to the private sphere or ameliorate sources of conflict. Rather it opened a new battlefront in the articulation of the good and therefore evil.

The internalisation and therefore the autonomy of sin from political and social problems offered by Luther was for many reformers simply inadequate to remedy the radical nature of sin. Historians since Engels have assigned the lay preacher Thomas Müntzer a starring role in the radical reformation.[43] Müntzer signifies a prefiguring of the entire tradition of revolutionary violence that binds the German Peasant War to French Jacobinism to Marxist-Leninism. The active removal of social and political evil from human nature and the world becomes a religious-secular calling. For Müntzer, the apprehension of human suffering created an imperative to drive out moral evils through revolutionary violence. Müntzer's insistence on human action to bring about political change and the removal of human evil was markedly different to Luther cautioning against political violence. Though both insisted on the imperative of faith for a righteous community, it had led them to holding quite incompatible moral and political doctrines. Luther was pessimistic over the possibility of human nature to overcome its original sinfulness through its own actions. This in turn created a politically and morally conservative attitude toward transforming moral evils in the secular world. For Luther even the best of wills was inherently perverted against itself, meaning that good works were always liable to reproduce some kind of suffering. As a result, Lutheran and Reformed communities were politically secure, since they generally resisted passing judgment over the political actions of ambitious German princes, and simultaneously more tolerant of the causes of evil before them.

By contrast, in his *Prague Manifesto*, Müntzer makes the case for radical intervention to remove political and social sinfulness because, seemingly, the Kingdom of God was imminent to history and 'that a momentous invincible, future reformation is very necessary and must be

[43] See Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans Moissaye J Olgin (London, Routledge 1926)

brought about.'[44] The anticipation of transformation and change of a world mired by evil also created a positive identification of evil. What I mean by this is that rather than viewing evil as some kind of privation or negation of the good. Müntzer and subsequent radical reformers saw injustice, greed and cruelty as not permanent features of society or politics but alterable through the assertion of human will. In contrast to Luther's Augustinian pessimism, Müntzer is far more Pelagian over the potential of the will to impose itself upon sinful human nature and create a community in which the good could flourish. He had preached that very soon God "will release the elect from their shame and pour forth his spirt over all flesh."[45] This message of an expectant community that would replace the injustice of the present filters into the ideas of the Swiss Brethren, Black forest peasants and Mullhausen Articles.[46] Faith is the centrepiece of a Christian community but it is up to human action to create fairer legal and political systems that habituate moral practices so that injustice, greed and poverty no longer dominate. Müntzer's style of interventionist political theology looks to remove evil through human action and finds comparable successors in the secular enlightenment who look to reform political and social evils through a self-assertive will.

What is important to recognise is the complexity of the relationship between faith and evil. The reconstitution of Christianity as a faith contributed to a slow disintegrating consensus over what it means to be Christian or how to identify a Christian community amidst such bewildering plurality. In theory, scriptural readings would take the place of instructing which moral virtues to practice and which moral virtues to avoid. However, once the sovereignty of every believer was asserted through *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*, there was little consensus over which virtues mattered most or how they would be constituted within a moral community. This spilled over into the fundamental tension over who belongs, who is saved and who is elected.

[44] Wu Ming, *Thomas Muntzer: Sermon to the Princes*, trans Michael Baylor (Verso, London 2010) pp 27-8
[45] Ibid 27
[46] See Michael Baylor, *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1991)

In general, the new faith reduces consensus over what evil is, how as a problem it must be faced and what kind of community this presupposes. Some of this was resolved through revolutionary violence for others it was backing the state to hold down human evil.

Conclusion

It is hoped this chapter has shown the critical significance of the reformation to the formation of the modern and secular discourse of evil. Many of the key reformers adopted the understanding of God that stands powerfully and remotely above God. However, without the security of the Church to interpret and give a solid meaning to the moral good nor the solid metaphysical system provided by Christian-Platonism both good and evil become dependent on an absolutist and radically free God. The unintelligibility of evil thanks to God's inexplicable will meant greater speculation over the nature of good and evil; whether this was through the role of Satan society or who was responsible for fighting sin and how lines would be drawn around political or social evil. The unintelligibility of evil created a positive role for the will in fighting and interpreting evil within human nature and within society. Therefore, what we have is an omnipotent divine will and an equally sovereign human will as the locus of making evil intelligible. Eventually, this confrontation is solved in favour of human agency by the secular enlightenment. But it comes with the creation of an entirely new metaphysical framework that replaces the form and matter distinction with the categories of the religious and the secular. It is to the modernity problem of evil and the reformulation of evil into the religious and the secular framework to which we now turn.

3. Modernity and Evil

In the previous two chapters we have traced the development of evil through antiquity and the Middle Ages respectively. In the first of these chapters, we examined this development in terms of evil understood through the form and matter distinction. The subsequent chapter introduced the central role of the reformation in the secularisation of evil which opened up a tension between God and human freedom as the keystone for marking the intelligibility of evil. This chapter looks to complete the historical dimension of what happened to evil or how evil was secularised by looking at evil within modernity.

The aim of this chapter is to bring to the forefront the categories of religion and the secular as the fundamental background through which the problem of evil is enunciated. What I hope to argue is that just as the form and matter distinction offered a robust metaphysical system to ground evil, today, this background has been replaced by the fundamental dichotomy between religion and the secular. The uncertainty generated by the reformation is resolved by turning evil exclusively into a problem of human freedom, something that was accelerated by the reformation, and human nature, which is the major contribution of the enlightenment. Both freedom and nature are essential to the re-valuation of the secular (something we shall analyse) and its demarcation from the religious. There are however, some significant differences to note. Firstly, whereas matter signified a lesser reality for Platonists, in comparison to the forms, and for Christians, in comparison to God or the *logos*, this is no longer the case in modernity. This is because the secular is identified with the material, temporal, political and everything pertaining to the physical. The material is interpreted as natural reality, identified with nature and is the fundamental ground upon which secular reality is found. By contrast, religion is best identified with everything that is not the secular. Therefore, the forms, ideas, the ineffable or later the Kantian *noumena* become the grounding for religion. In comparison to the secular, religion signifies a diminished and devalued understanding of this new reality. As a result, there

has been a fundamental reversal of intellectual polarities, whereby the originally inferior world of matter, body, pain and suffering has come to be seen as the only 'real' reality. And the previously superior reality of forms or ideas comes to be seen as falling outside empirical and scientific interpretations of reality or nature.

Secondly, this has also impacted how we ground and give some intelligibility to evil. That is, evil has to be brought in line with matter or indeed the natural secular world, at which point it can be replaced as just another natural vice, in that it is motivated by natural propensities originating in human nature or human freedom which can be reformed. Alternatively, evil can be eliminated entirely, by virtue of its connection to religion and because religion signifies the 'old' 'outmoded' 'traditional' 'mythological' conception of reality built of forms, God or the *logos*. Indeed, perhaps the most common-sense interpretation of modernity is understood as the emancipation or 'rupture' from religion, even though this was not the original meaning of the modern. This self-understanding of the secular is thanks to the influential enlightenment critique of religion, through the ideologies of liberalism, socialism or naturalism which devalued pretty much all religion as something metaphysical, supernatural and superstitious. To that extent, the only intelligible reality that we can speak about comes with affirming nature or autonomous human action.

It is in the nineteenth and twentieth century that religion and the secular come to be thought as independent intellectual categories and more significantly as dichotomies. However, it is in the previous two centuries where this transformation begins to take hold of the intellectual culture of Europe. The growth of what Taylor describes as 'exclusive humanism' begins with the self-understanding that we must look to religion for inspiration but generally becomes more intractable to the extent that religious assertions do not correspond to nature as understood by rationalism and empiricism respectively. We shall examine how this transformation took place and how these categories of religion and secular have come to acquire such intellectual

significance, to the extent they provide a kind 'doxa.' That is, they help to organise reality by identifying natural with the secular and religion with an outmoded supernaturalism. The important point to note is the categories of religion and the secular will be used to explain how evil is made intelligible within secular modernity. The reason we didn't do this in the previous chapter is that because it is essentially the reformation and its new interpretation of God, Christianity and human nature that paves the way for the emergence of religion and the secular as dichotomous categories. And it is the religion and the secular that help to solve the problem and questions raised by the reformation, by replacing divine freedom with human autonomy, sectarian religion with the privatisation of religion and the laws of reason with the law of nature.

What will also become clear at the end of this chapter is that despite the best efforts to see religion and the secular as naturally opposed to one another; and the best effort to remove religion from politics or society, a residual element of religion always remains within the secular. This point is significant, given the next part of the thesis will look at attempts to develop a 'purely' secular concept of evil, one that swings between removing entirely any substantive connection to religion or alternatively giving up on evil because it is essentially religious. We shall point out in the subsequent section (section three) that both religion and evil are essential to any secular understanding of evil, because a secular understanding need not be premised on completely denying religion entirely.

This chapter therefore divides as follows: (i) examine briefly the categories of the secular and religion before modernity and its transformation; (ii) the revaluation of the secular by reformers as a space for human redemption (iii) the enlightenment critique of religion that devalues religion by relegating it into the private sphere of life and essentially supernatural concept; (iv) the new understanding of nature as central to how evil has come to be understood (iv) finally, the significance of individual freedom and responsibility that is a result of the reformation but is also shaped by this new understanding of nature.

The Secular

In this section we shall introduce the idea of the secular that is today taken for granted as the default construal of human experience. According to Casanova 'The secular has become a central modern category – theological-philosophical, legal-political, and cultural-anthropological – to construct, codify, grasp and experience a realm or reality differentiated from the "the religious."'[1] What is significant to note in Casanova's analysis is the historical roots of the secular and the extent to which the secular has undergone an immense reformulation. Indeed, originally the secular was a *theological* category, that was understood through the spiritual and temporal division of Christendom. The Latin word *saeculum* was understood as a period of time or signifying 'age.' Augustine further interpreted the *saeculum* to mean the division of history into the history of the *saeculum* and sacred biblical history.[2] During the Middle Ages, the secular became attached to a religion/secular dyad. This dyad differentiated a religious realm dedicated to worship of God and the performance of virtue, from a secular realm defined in terms of temporality, history and materiality.

This neat division comes under increasing scrutiny and pressure thanks to reforming priests, unsure about the conformity of lay Christian practice to the Gospel. These priests come to leave the world of worship, devoted to religion, to enter the *saeculum*. Indeed, originally, to become secular or *secularise*, meant to abandon a cloistered religious life, monks inverted this dualism and lived in the *saeculum* in order to make it correspond to the commandments of the Gospel. This pathway towards making the *saeculum* an image of the Gospel initially pursued by medieval reform movements was radicalised by the reformation who looked to reform society and politics more comprehensively around the Gospel. According to Casanova this eventually

[1] Jose Casanova, 'The Secular, Secularization, Secularisms' In *Rethinking Secularism.* by Craig J. Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011*)* 54
[2] Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, [Rev. ed.] (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988) 10

led to 'the overcoming of the medieval Christian dualism through a positive affirmation and revaluation of the *saeculum'* and 'imbuing the immanent secular world with a quasi-transcendental meaning as the place for human flourishing.'[3]

The blurring of this dualism was to take centuries to work itself out, with the eventual result that the secular comes to be seen as an entirely self-sufficient form of reality, independent of religion entirely. A point that differentiates enlightenment reform from religious reformers is the latter wanted to preserve the supremacy of religion in public and intellectual matters. An important indicator of this difference is reflected in the shift of meaning of the term to *secularise* during the enlightenment. It is therefore no longer understood as priests working to make the *saeculum* a place for Christian worship, but rather, with the consolidation of confessional groups in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, secularisation takes place through the aggressive confiscation of Church property by the state. The significant result of this transition is that the *saeculum* also comes to be identified with the power of the secular state, which defines where religion is allowed to operate and its liberty to do so outside this essentially privatised domain. The removal of religion from the public domain also creates a sense in which the true public domain and the public good is understood in the absence of religious reality. The secular as such is understood as the intelligible in the sense of the Platonic real world of forms; just as the world of matter was an obstruction to the intelligibility of the good; so, this obstruction is painted as religion and therefore the beliefs and practices that religion presupposes.

Therefore, in the centuries that follow the reformation, the secular no longer carries with it the sense in which it is a residual category to religion, or an inferior way to live life that must be reformed by the priests. It not only has the power to define the public good, but also the authority to define what is intelligible and what is not intelligible in the public and social world.

[3] Casanova, 'The Secular' 57

Increasingly, religion is reduced to the realm of unintelligibility through the reduction of its power (privatisation) and critique of its fundamental beliefs and assertions (naturalisation). We can therefore debate, how much secularisation has taken place, or where the separation between religion and secular actually lies, but it is reasonable to say that it is religion whose influence is more circumscribed and under the power to the secular today.

The Reformation and the Revaluation of the Secular

What is ironic is the shift towards secularisation and the revaluation of the secular doesn't take place in opposition to religion but initially through the helping hand of religion. In this section I want to examine one of the causes for this elevation of the secular as the natural mode of understanding reality. It is hoped that we can add some more detail to the claims made above over how the revaluation of the secular takes place.

One contribution of the reformation to the contemporary understanding of the secular is how the secular or temporal world is affirmed. In the previous chapter we mentioned Luther's apolitical stance towards defining the public good. However, this was one in a range of possibilities opened up by the reformers attempt to define a Christian life and how it related to the *saeculum*. Contemporary German scholarship on the reformation, have applied the term *Konfessionalisierung* or confessionalisation, to describe the adaption of the Christian religion(s) understood now as 'Anabaptist' 'Calvinist', 'Catholic' and 'Lutheran'; to the new political and social geography of Europe. Significantly, what the confessionalisation paradigm offers is that rather than see the reformation and the secularisation of Europe as two separate processes. Instead, it shows the 'decisive preconditions for Europe's turn onto paths of modernization were installed not in opposition to the religious forces of confessionalization prevailing in that epoch, but closely intertwined with them.'[4] In other words, the reformers

[4] Heinz Schilling, *Early Modern European Civilisation And Its Political and Cultural Dynamism* (London, University Press of New England 2008) pp 13-4

belief in becoming saved and justified by God contributes to positive activity in the world, so that the secular is also responsible for receiving grace, or becoming elected. In other words, the *saeculum* is elevated by religious reformers, because it is also seen as a medium for human election through divine grace. It is not yet intrinsically worthy, in the sense of construing the secular as a space of exclusive human flourishing, but it is also no longer a residual category that we need to simply reform. Instead, the *saeculum* as a space for receiving grace and election bequeaths a seriousness upon the *saeculum* that elevates it as a space for creating a meaningful social existence.

We can see this revaluation of the *saeculum* through the interventionist practice of the reformers. An important principle that contributes to the revaluation of the secular is the concept of *Sozialdisziplinierung* or social discipline. The concept of social discipline meant the goal of each confession was to implement and to impose on every believer a more stringent level of belief and practice that corresponded to the commandments of the Gospel. One result of this was it contributed to the shrinkage of supernatural reality, through the devaluation of inter-cessionary modes of beliefs, that had formerly been embedded into the secular. Indeed, criticisms of 'folk' superstitions like 'witchcraft' or 'magic' were also applied more broadly to Catholic sacraments or the practices of other confessions, that were understood by many reformers as relying on the idolatrous superstitions internalised by the Church. Their desacralisation along with other beliefs deemed superstitious created a more streamlined secular space that was accepting of Protestant (or Catholic) superstitions to the detriment of those outside this confessional space. However, this arrangement was always vulnerable to self-critique. Therefore, it is only a matter of time that the accusations of superstition applied to Catholic or folk beliefs were also directed back to Protestantism's own magical belief in grace, resurrection or God itself. The sacralisation of the secular therefore created a fertile

ground for scepticism and doubt directed by the growing numbers under the influence of rationalism and empiricism at the claims made by reformers.

The other side of the revaluation of the *saeculum* was the concentration on practice *via* the elevation of the Ten Commandments, through the desire to impose a consistent set of religious practices upon state and society, all of which corresponded to God's commandments spelled out in the Gospel. Historically, the most influential example of the confluence of church discipline, moral supervision, heresy control and state formation is the Calvinist experiment in Geneva. Its basic structure is laid out in *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, where Calvin created four orders of ministry: pastors, doctors, elders and deacons. Out of these ministries it was the elders, elected by the congregation who formed the consistory, and in turn supported the secular government and imposed discipline within the congregation. Firstly, the consistory monitored clues for deviant heretical beliefs, and secondly, the consistory focused on offences against the social community, chiefly sexual morality. Obstinate sinners were offered the chance to recant their beliefs or repent their sinful behaviour, then they were allowed back into the community to receive the sacraments. If they refused to make penance, the consistory had the power to hand over unrepentant sinners to the secular magistrate, who would then decide whether to banish them or punish them through capital punishment.

The ideal polity, which Calvin undoubtedly felt he had instituted at Geneva, is a divine instrument were faith and secular power interlock to create a Christian political community essential to receiving human salvation. There is, therefore, a massive investment in secular power to remake society that is worthy before God. At the centre of Calvin's Christian polity is the magistrate who was 'endowed with divine authority'[5] and thus acts as 'Gods legates'[6] making sure the laws that govern the polity conform to God's commandment. For Calvin

[5] Harro Hopfel *Luther and Calvin On Secular Authority (*Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1991) 51
[6] Ibid 52

secular power is therefore not a punishment for sin but a refraction of the divine will, meaning that 'it comes about by providence and sacred ordinances of God, whose pleasure it is to have mankind governed in this manner.'[7] In this way we can see the early Protestant churches trying to apply the Gospel beyond the individual situation but to the formation of a Christian political community through which becomes a vehicle of meriting grace.

While the concept of 'social discipline doesn't deal with the problem of how evil is traditionally understood. The positive affirmation of the secular orients believers into actively removing evil in the world by re-making sinful society and community into one that is worthy of election. The active removal of evil through positive intervention also introduces the idea that evil has a positive (as opposed to a negative or privative) footing in reality, and this is essential facet to the revaluation of the secular life. We see this in the numerous pronouncements Calvin makes in his work *On Civil Government*. It is clear that guarding against and fighting back against evil is essential to the practical goals of the state as much to the idea of a Christian polity. Calvin writes true justice [of rulers], is to purse the evil-doers and unrighteous with drawn sword. If [rulers] sheath their sword and keep their hands unsullied by blood, while the wicked roam about massacring and slaughtering, then so far from reaping praise for their goodness and justice, they make themselves guilty of the greatest possible injustice.'[8]

The revaluation of the secular as a route toward human salvation brought with it significant problems. It followed that often opponents of the Christian polity could easily be construed as opponents of the divine will. Given the plurality and heterogeneity that came with individuals interpreting Gospel more personally, this was also a recipe for social conflict and communal division that spiralled out of control during the wars of religion. However, this is a consequence

[7] Ibid 52
[8] Ibid 62

of the conviction that evil is something positive in the natural world and can be removed through the application of human effort. Rather than evil as essentially negative and a form of privation of the good.

Although the desire to recreate a community orientated by the Gospel meant the re-evaluation of secular, the violence and division this provoked amongst Churches, religions and communities also provided the justification for the relegation of the religious good to the private realm in order to ameliorate sources of conflict. This is exemplified by the Westphalia treaty (1648) that cements the division of religion and politics. In the coming centuries a substantive religious good informed by the Gospel was gradually replaced with a model in which individuals chose their own religious and moral beliefs so long as they didn't challenge the sovereignty of the state and kept their theological and moral disagreements and therefore all talk about evil in the private sphere (this didn't stop secular evil talk, this persisted in the registers of crime, immorality, harms, wrongdoing and pain) Nevertheless, through confessionalisation and social discipline there is a significant push towards individualism that looks to reform the social world through human freedom. This originates with Protestant reformers, but is brought out more comprehensively by enlightenment thinkers who are not encumbered by the same devotion to the Gospel, but rather want to turn the secular world into a collective space for human flourishing without the interference of God, grace or religion.

Taylor describes this new mood as 'Christianized Stoicism' which refers to the application of human will, power and action to the reformulation of secular society and the exorcising of inherent social and political evil from the world. According to Taylor this new identity of being secular or the secular as the realm that has its own values comes with 'the disidentification, and even the hostility to the older forms of collective ritual and belonging.'[9] The secular is reimagined so that autonomy is no longer geared to the fulfilment of religious commandments.

[9] Charles Taylor, 'Western Secularity' In *Rethinking Secularism*, 49

Instead, the accumulation of individual rights or expansion of moral freedoms is identified as the ultimate goal of the state as responsible for human welfare in this world, without one eye on pleasing God or becoming worthy of grace for the next world. It emerges with Natural Law theory and through Hugo Grotius and Justus Lipsius giving a conception of the secular world as intrinsically worthy. The reformers universalising disciplinary standards across society therefore created the pathway for the subsequent universalisation of secular individual and political rights. What is of course different is this revaluation of the secular is intensified by enlightenment thinkers who introduce a radically new dynamic in terms of how self and society relate and the kinds of political and legal institutions necessary to make the secular into a realm that *is intrinsically worthy of devotion and not simply devotion for the sake of salvation*.

The Enlightenment Devaluation of Religion

The aim of this section is to examine the enlightenment devaluation of religion through what is commonly denoted as the enlightenment critique of religion. However, this critique of religion presupposes a significant alternation in the understanding of Christianity from something that signified community, solidarity and collective worship of and under God into a *religion*. The use of religion had been revived by humanists like Marsilio Ficino who understood *religio* as the innate and divine instinct to worship God. [10] By the enlightenment and thanks to the reformation shattering the possibility of consensus on the meaning of Christian worship or the nature of God, the world seemed to be populated entirely by religion. The distinction between Christianity and religion is clarified by Bossy who writes that.

> By 1700 the Christian world was full of religions, objective social and moral entities characterised by system, principles and hard edges which could be envisaged by Voltaire as cutting one another's throats. Above their multiplicity placed a shadowy abstraction, *the* Christian Religion, and somewhere above that in an upper region of the classifying system, religion with a capital 'R', planted in its new domain by people who did not usually feel or believe it.[11]

[10] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (San Francisco, Harper and Row 1978) 33
[11] John Bossy, *Christianity* 170

This new prominence given to religion is also accompanied by the reconceptualisation of religion into a system of beliefs, axioms, propositions and the focus of religion as an abstract idea[12] whose truthfulness can be ascertained by rationality. An important work in this regard is the work of Hugo Grotius, *De veritate religionis Christianae*. Furthermore, there is a awareness of the real function and meaning of religion is best understood as a privatised belief system and that salvation is essentially individual. Perhaps the most significant representative of the privatisation trend is John Locke and his work *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. What is important to note is that there is an immense rethinking of religion in the seventeenth century, and also a shrinkage of the space it can operate within. This construction of religion as belief or a private system of morality is as much an invention of secular modernity as popular sovereignty or free-market capitalism. More specifically, religion is demarcated from the growing differentiation of the spheres of human life into 'politics' 'ethics' 'education' and 'science' which belong to the space of the secular.

The aim of the enlightenment critique of religion was to measure the extent to which religion is true as an idea or belief. More specifically, the extent to which it's beliefs and practices ought to correspond to the new interpretation of nature and matter being preached by rationalism and empiricism more generally. Ostensibly, this is better understood if we examine how the natural itself was reconceptualised by enlightenment thinkers like Bacon, Descartes and Hobbes. However, we shall wade through that in the subsequent section. What we want to highlight in this section is the sense of hostility toward religion that comes with secular thinkers identifying religion as superstitious and intolerant because it is not true by the exacting standards of rationalism and empiricism. This is an essential feature of the enlightenment critique of religion.

[12] Cantwell Smith, *Religion* 38

Indeed, this mood of hostility to the past or older forms of belonging and belief is implicit to the category modernity which increasingly defines itself against the past or rupture from this past. Historically, the Latin 'modus' 'modernus' and in 'modernitas' simply conveyed the contrast of 'old' and 'new.'[13] The dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' were identified 'as marking an age of genuine novelty, an era with assumptions about the highest or fundamental things incompatible with past assumptions.'[14] It is uncontroversial to state that gradually the 'old' and the past is identified with religion and though many other names; superstition, intolerance, immature and authoritarian. All of which are still relevant and often implicit to public discourse and intellectual conversations about the religion and its place in society or politics. What is worth pointing out is the extent to which the idea of a linear historical break or rupture from the past in order to usher in a novel society is a regurgitation of Christian self-understanding, that takes its own revelation as signalling a novel relationship between God and human beings.

The enlightenment is nevertheless essential to how the binary opposition between religion and secular has become embedded in European self-understanding. It is of course worth pointing out that the enlightenment critique or religion was a broad phenomenon and not a monolith echoing a singular voice, theory but degrees of opposition to religion. Ernest Becker argued that Christian ideals played a significant role in the formation of the enlightenment through its influence upon some of its greatest exponents, in particular, Newton and Kant.[15] Nevertheless, what we are interested with here is how religion as an idea was devaluated through critique of the truthfulness of its beliefs and therefore lost much of its former prominence as a creditable intellectual interpretation of reality and secondly as a political force shaping secular reality. This scepticism towards historically prevailing political and intellectual ideas is summed in Kant's observation that.

[13] Gillespie, *Theological Origins,* pp 2-3
[14] Robert Pippin, *Modernism*, 17
[15] Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Yale University Press 2003)

> Our age is the genuine age of criticism, to which everything must submit. Religion through its holiness and legislation through its majesty commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. But in this way they excite a just suspicion against themselves, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to withstand its free and public examination.[16]

We are interested in the more radical secularist elements of the enlightenment. To arrive at this understanding, we ought to examine the critique of religion through the re-categorisation of religion, that takes place through: (i) it's redefinition as a natural religion and therefore having to correspond to what human nature is; (ii) the privatisation of religion, so that the religion and politics is interpreted as essential to a peaceful secular life but also the essentially moral nature of religion is cemented into the minds of Europeans.

Like most intellectual categories throughout the sixteenth and particularly seventeenth century, religion was reformulated into an object of rational investigation in order to assess its truths according to the new scientific knowledge. The new context for religion was the realm of nature.[17] This obviously presupposes that the enlightenment had a unified grip on the meaning of nature. Of course, they didn't, empiricists, differed from Cartesians, who disagreed with those still committed to the Aristotelian formulation of nature. These diverging starting points naturally prejudiced how religion was understood in relation to nature and in relation to what constituted natural reality. Harrison flags up the identification of religion with nature in three different senses.[18] One is that natural religion is fallen and is demarcated from true or 'revealed' or supernatural religion. The second, identifies natural religion with practical reason, and instead of seeing it opposed to supernatural religion, sees an inter-relationship between

[16] Immanuel Kant, *Preface* <A> in *A Critique of Pure Reason,* trans and ed by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1998) pp 100-1
[17] Peter Harrison, "*Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990) 6
[18] Ibid 6-7

natural and revealed religion. The final reformulation pertains to treating nature as self-operating and as such marks the advance of pure reason over religious supernaturalism.

It is this latter more aggressive interpretation of religion which has contributed more than the former two views to the devaluation of religion. And even though the enlightenment was a polyvalent phenomenon, its most influential historical image seems to be the one uttered by Diderot in which nature implores man: '"Cast out the Gods who have usurped my power, and return to my laws. Return to nature from which you have fled; she will console you and dispel all those fears which now oppress you."'[19] There are numerous theories of religion produced by the enlightenment that either interpreted religion as opposed to nature and therefore the essential cause for superstition or evil in the world or alternatively theories that interpreted the entire concept of religion as a natural phenomenon. We shall only point to two different interpretations of religion that are perhaps not only noted for their brilliant originality but are also examples of the more robust and hasher separation of the natural and supernatural in the categorisation of religion.

Firstly, there is Spinoza, whose *Theological-Political Treatise* has had singular impact on subsequent Biblical criticism and as such undermining it as the literal word of God. Spinoza applied philological, historical, philosophical critiques to the possibility of understanding the history of prophecy, the linguistic background in which scripture was revealed and the compatibility between miracles and reason. Spinoza's critique naturalises the Bible through historicisation it's truth claims and this is because its actions evolved from specific historical circumstances. The independence of nature from God's direct intervention is most evident in his discussion of miracles recounted in the Bible. According to Spinoza, revelations themselves prove that 'nature maintains a fixed and immutable order that God has been the same in all

[19] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans Fritz Koelin and James Pettegrove (New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1979) 135

ages known and unknown to us, and that the laws of nature are so perfect and so fruitful that nothing can be added or detracted from them, and miracles only seem to be new owing to men's ignorance.'[20] What Spinoza was articulating was scripture was like nature and therefore ought to be read in terms of causes and motivations that operate in the natural world. To comprehend scripture meant putting the pieces of the historical circumstances and interpreting the actions relative to the possibilities created by their historical contexts, and with a grasp of natural human psychology to boot. The historical operates through natural causes, causes to which God is not above, but instead within the system of unified laws of nature. For Spinoza, scientific evidence proved that nature was ordered, God was not outside this system of law and causes that determined the natural. Miracles were as much against nature as they were against God. It was therefore only logical to think of the plain message of scripture and the miracle stories of divine intervention entailing the suspension of natural law as against natural human and divine reason and as such plainly false. What Spinoza contributes to is a profound secularisation of scripture, to the extent it is brought under the rules and laws of nature. In time, historical actors and events in scripture have to be connected to human action, understood naturally by the social situation and natural human motivations and not under the inspiration of revelation.

Another important contribution to the devaluation of religion is David Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*. Hume's *Dialogues* examines the traditional assertions made by believers over the question of God's existence, God's nature or attributes, the creation of the universe and the problem of evil. Developments in optics, biology and physics in the previous centuries had spurred on some rational believers and deists to ground religion also within an empirical framework. Hume's scepticism toward natural religion is how few of these assertions are actually supported by evidence or indeed reason itself. Hume writes 'essence of that

[20] Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed Israel, Jonathan, and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) 95

supreme, his attributes, the manner of his existence, the very nature of his duration, these and every particular, which regards so divine a being, are mysterious to men.'[21] What is problematic for both theists and empirical theists is that human understanding based on senses is itself inconsistent and therefore the desire to have a consistent proof for God based upon a faulty empirical sense is itself problematic. Hume's work is therefore significant because it challenges attempts to reconcile religious and rational metaphysics by examining the assertions made on behalf of them by religious empiricists. The claims of natural religion built on rational metaphysics are therefore interpreted by Hume as giving rise to the same difficulties of religious metaphysics and as such these assertions fail to live up to the rigorous standards of scientific empiricism.

In sum, Hume's empirical critique of religion and Spinoza's naturalistic interpretation of scripture cement the inferiority truths and beliefs of traditional revealed religion relative to the new naturalistic principles valued by rationalism and empiricism respectively. In doing so, the secular, identified with either rationalist and empirical mode of organising reality, is not only made superior to religion but is given the honour of reproducing religion and passing judgement upon it (as essentially superstitious, non-natural and metaphysical). In the same manner Christianity once passed judgement upon all other beliefs, idolatries and heresies.

The other side to the devaluation of religion takes place through the loss of political authority and in particular the power of religion to define the public good and political rights in general. Locke is the paradigmatic liberal figure preaching a political philosophy that established tolerance as the bedrock of true religion and therefore a free and equal society. He writes 'All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind.'[22] Locke's interpretation of religion as internal, psychological and cognitive marks an

[21] David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: *And Other Writings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2007) 17
[22] John Locke*, A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill 1955*)* 18

important rupture in the historical category of religion. Locke's relegation of religion to the private space of conscience is a response to religious sectarians and confessions committed to their own religious truth, creating social and political division that spilled over into bloodshed and violence. And therefore, a need to protect minorities from persecution of government making political capital from their religious minority status.

The identification of religious truth with the conscience also marks an important admission that saving religion cannot be achieved through religion implemented publicly as was practised in Calvin's Geneva. According to Cavanaugh 'In Locke, we find a modern version of the spatial division of the world into religious and secular pursuits.'[23] Social peace is guaranteed through secular political rights and an attitude of 'toleration' so that religion has no role in shaping the political goals of the kingdom, state or empire. Locke writes 'The Care of Souls cannot belong to the Civil Magistrate because his power consists only in outward force' and 'the Church is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the Commonwealth.'[24] Locke was not alone in articulating this separation of religion from the political, but his argument that true religion was individual, and moral was significant because of the influence it exerted outside of England and in particular upon the founding fathers of America.

Whether Locke wanted to devalue religion or cause religion to lose political significance entirely is debatable. What is hard to dispute is the consequences this separation has meant that religious beliefs would never have a monopoly in defining the public good. The separation of religion and the state is central to the philosophy of secularism that takes hold of European societies during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Secularism is interpreted differently; from neutrality and therefore equal access to religious and non-religious citizens, to an aggressive form of state expansion that wants to shape society without the interference of

[23] William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York, Oxford University Press 2009) 80
[24] Timothy Fitzgerald 'Encompassing Religion and Privatised Religions and the Invention of Modern Politics' In *Religion and the Secular*: *Historical and Colonial Formations* (London, Routledge 2007) pp 214-5

religion in the public realm entirely. Nevertheless, what both secularisms signify is it enshrines the priority of the state through the power to make religion effectively do what it tells it to do. In this regard, the privatisation of religion has enshrined the sense in which religious beliefs are a divisive force that given public oxygen is liable to cause intolerance and even violence. This negative assessment has arguable been more detrimental and influential in shaping the perception of religion in the minds of most non-believers and even believers. What undergirds the assumption of religious violence and religious intolerance is the secular as our best bet for social peace and redemption through affirming an exclusively this worldly political identity.

Nature and Evil

In the previous section we have tried to sketch out how the religious and the secular have come to form the background through which human beings make sense of reality. We have endeavoured to explain how this takes place through two processes. Firstly, beginning with reformers, the revaluation of the secular as space for human salvation. This message of salvation is turned in the subsequent centuries into the secular space being understood as somewhere the human will can impose itself and in turn make the secular into something intrinsically good. The second process is the re-categorisation and subsequent devaluation of religion. This takes place firstly, through interpreting religion naturalistically, so that assertions about God, scripture and faith cannot be made intelligible within rational or empirical framework. And secondly, the inability to prove such assertions contributes to the secularisation (through privatisation) of religion. Therefore, religious devaluation takes place through the loss of political power and intellectual authority and the replacement of the secular as defining political and intellectual reality.

We shall now turn to the question how evil fits in within this new reality coming to be dominated by these two constitutive categories of modernity. What I hope to show is that the question of evil experiences the same fate as the category of religion. Firstly, the reality of evil

is determined by the category of nature and secondly, because evil is like any other object in nature, it is transformable through the human will, this is one of the impacts of the reformation. Therefore, the second aspect of this transformation involves a radical sense of responsibility for removing evil from the world, built out of a radical sense of autonomy to define what evil is, its intelligibility and its elimination if needed.

However, before we look at the relationship between evil and nature, we ought to say a few words on the reformulation of nature. In the opening chapter we noted that matter represented an inferior reality, but it nevertheless represented the ground to make evil intelligible. What has happened during secularity is that nature slowly came to be identified with reality 'tout court.' As we noted earlier, there wasn't a common or unified understanding of nature, given the differences between rationalist and empirical interpretations of nature. Yet, there was a common sense of opposition towards the Aristotelian understanding of nature that supported and influenced the idea of religion as outdated, wrong and not real. According to Cassirer the 'modern concept of nature…is characterised above all by the new relationship which develops between sensibility and intellect, between experience and though, between the sensible world and the intelligible world.'[25] Very briefly, in the medieval system, reality was understood and assigned in terms of its position and proximity to the One or God. There is knowledge of nature, but this knowledge cannot be thought outside or independently of God or the One; since nature takes its existence from them. Moreover, knowledge of nature is likewise limited because it passes over onto contingent being, which is dependent on the light of reason passing from God onto the material world of sensibility, carnality and corruption. The fall of man and therefore natural human depravity always means that some kind of divine aid is needed to make sense of the world of nature.

[25] Ernst Cassirer, *Enlightenment* 38

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the view that nature as containing latent power because of its relationship with God or the One is replaced. Instead of the Aristotelian understanding of matter that explains change within nature, early modern thinkers adopt an Epicurean matter theory that forced a substantial rethinking of how qualities reside intrinsically within matter.[26] Specifically the way nature operated was no longer dependent on an original cause that bestowed some intrinsic quality onto nature but rather laws of nature willed autonomously by God (and then eventually in the absence of God). Perhaps the two key figures for this rethinking of nature, who come from different methodological backgrounds but saw nature as ruled by laws and regular motions are Descartes and Newton respectively. For Descartes, nature could be understood through tracing it back fundamental to mathematical principles. The world of nature is therefore made intelligible through understanding universal mathematical principles that govern nature. These principles of course presuppose an exact method to ensure the certainty principles being posited.[27] Once a mathematical method is found then these principles are found in the laws of motion. The laws of motion were created by God and are unchanging because they derive from God who is responsible for upholding these laws. Newton retained the idea of Laws of nature under the command of an autonomous God, but simplified and challenged Descartes more complex system of mathematical axioms making up nature. For Newton, human nature and physical nature were identically bound to a single law that affected both, accordingly 'nature is nothing, but a force implanted in things and the law by which all entities proceed along their proper paths'[28] he wrote. Nevertheless, what both Descartes and Newton had achieved was to make nature more autonomous, despite their probable intention of keeping nature under the command of a sought of Deist God. The close unified system whereby natural and supernatural were in an ontological relationship is

[26] Peter Harrison, "Science and Secularization." *Intellectual History Review* 27, Vol 27, No. 1 (2017) 57
[27] See René Descartes, *Discourses on Method and the Meditations*, trans F E Sutcliffe (London, Penguin 1968)
[28] Ernst Cassirer, *Enlightenment* 44

dispensed with because nature received no direct intervention from God. The next logical step was to simply get rid of God as determining the laws and make nature self-sufficient.

One result of a single law of nature running through the universe and human nature was that human action was intelligible in relation to its commensurability to the law of nature. In theory, human action that deviated from the law of nature could be deemed as immoral or indeed evil, by virtue of disobeying natural law commanded by God. In this respects it marked a change from the Aristotelian inspired virtue-laden ethics which believed that nature and therefore human nature contained a *telos* towards the good, and as a result opened the door to a more naturalistic interpretation of the doctrine of original sin. Some of this had already been made possible by Luther and Calvin, who defined sinfulness as something quite radical in human nature and this opened up disagreements over the extent of evil in human nature and whether human beings could decide through reflection or agreement what was good or evil. As we noted in the previous chapter, during the seventeenth century, the fall narrative was central to asserting everything from the origins of the state, political rights, to the corruption of human understanding by the fall. The new sciences of nature therefore gave a renewed importance to the doctrine of original sin. To be clear there was no one single theory produced to refute original sin as the cause for human depravity. Nevertheless, the general temper of the enlightenment pushed forward by Voltaire, Diderot, Hume, or Rosseau was to attack the doctrine that human evil was down to the disobedience of pre-historical human ancestors causing future generations to be born depraved, wicked and malicious.

The reasons for human evil were therefore brought under the purview of human nature which is an essential step to its secularisation. This gave evil a renewed sense of intelligibility given the indeterminacy brought about by the reformation and the lack of clarity over who was the exact agent of evil. Eventually, the cause of evil could be identified with natural motives like aggression or fear, meaning that some people are naturally more predisposed to acting

upon than others. An important example for this type of naturalist interpretation of evil is the empirical psychology of Hobbes. In *De Cive* and *Levithan*, Hobbes had described the state of nature in the least flattering terms imaginable for puritanical England. In the absence of a sovereign, the state of nature marked a brutish need for survival that brought out every depraved trait and instinct. Hobbes' description of the state of nature as essentially a constant state of war was opposed to the views of many Christians, who despite their belief in original sin, were nevertheless convinced that nature in general was ordered, peaceful and under the command of a loving God.

Hobbes believes that neither good nor evil are independent realities that describe or relate to an immutable law or state of affairs. Instead 'one must recognise that *good* and *evil* are names imposed on things to signify desire for or aversion from the things so named.'[29] There is also some relativity in evaluating something as good and evil, given the evidence that human beings are ruled by their passions, 'where what one man *praises* i.e calls *good*, the other *abuses* as *bad*; indeed the same man at different times *praises* or *blames* the same thing.'[30] The implication of Hobbes position were horrific for a religious society. What Hobbes is saying is that human beings in their natural conditions will arrive at an understanding evil through their natural passions. Hobbes writes that 'governed every one by his own law [then] . . . in the condition of men that have no other law but their own appetites, there can be no general rule of good and evil actions.'[31] To Protestants and Catholics who believed that good and evil is determined by God's will or the scholastics who argued that both good and evil are qualities inhering in nature, Hobbes is offering an entirely different explanation. In their natural condition, and without a political sovereign to enforce obedience to God's commandments

[29] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press1998) 55. See also Helen Thornton, *State of Nature or Eden?: Thomas Hobbes and his contemporaries on the natural conditions of human beings* (Rochester, Rochester University Press 2005) Chapter 1
[30] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* 55
[31] Helen Thornton, *State of Nature or Eden* 23

(that would create in benevolent order) human beings would resort to desires to understand evil. Without political authority only a sovereign can tell us what the nature of evil or why such an act *is*, or *ought* to be considered evil. The faith of the scholastics in the light of reason inhering in nature is equally misplaced. Although, political society may create rules and commandments that divide good and evil, and they may even convince themselves these are objective; these are only useful or intelligible to the extent there is sovereign power to uphold them, and enforce these moral standards. It Is therefore neither the light of reason that differentiates and preserves good from evil nor the fear of divine judgement. We need to strip back doctrines or philosophies and see what kind of motives or reasons justify in the state of nature. It is only in the natural condition that we can see the true value of good and evil, which is always subordinated to the desire of human beings to ensure safety and survival. Evil appears as an instrumental and political conceptualisation, necessary for survival. In the state of nature, the passions will override the rules of reason and the commandments of God. It is through absolutist sovereign who effectively takes on the secular authority of the Christian God that we can have any hope of understanding or living by good and evil.

What Hobbes provides is a possible overcoming of how the pain-pleasure calculation made by human beings when deciding evil action. Instead of seeing nature as perfectly good and therefore anything against nature as causing suffering or pain. There is no definitive scale to human nature, nature can be cruel, violent or nasty, or benign, there is no predestined path that it must follow or law that it adheres to. It changes because our passions are triggered by fear, fear of the other, the unknown or death. This creates a sense of insecurity about one's existential condition that forces human beings to fall into wickedness. A similar diagnosis was made a few centuries later by Freund who argued in *Civilisation and its Discontents* that wickedness comes from natural aggressive impulses that are turned against the self by civilisation for the sake of social preservation. What binds Hobbes and Freund is a pessimism about human nature,

taken to mean that in their natural self they are overcome by aggression, desire and fear. In the state of nature, where the natural self is not encumbered by religious convention or societal moral standards what is only certain is that passions will rule, and passions will change. Hobbes doesn't go as far as calling passions as evil or the cause of moral evil, given they are essential to survival in the state of nature and if we are going to imagine some future possibility out of evil. What Hobbes does through raising the significance of the passions is to isolate a propensity in nature that is fundamental to making evil intelligible.

Individual and Radical Responsibility for Evil

In the previous section we examined the importance of this new interpretation of nature as the background against which secular understanding of evil emerges. Contrary to the medieval understanding of nature blessed with inherent potential to the good, the modern understanding of nature doesn't propel one to obey reason or God's commandment. What we do have is a sense in which nature can be remade through the imposition of will and effort. This is supported by an understanding of the will that is not compelled to obey the good in nature but free to also to disobey the good. Nature therefore doesn't necessarily leave human beings predetermined to obey passions or become entrapped by fear. This freedom to make the good is derivative of the reformers desire to create a Christianised society. The positive affirmation of the secular is completed with a sense that human beings ought to take individual responsibility for this world. Instead of the secular world as a bridge towards human salvation in another world, taking responsibility for the world recreates the secular into an intrinsically worthy space for human salvation. The aim of this final section is to point out the otherside to evil in modernity that is the secular as a form of this worldly redemption that originates in the reformers revaluation of the secular but is radicalised to the point that this worldly flourishing becomes the end in itself.

What accompanied scientific discovery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was also a mood that anything was possible if human intelligence and will were applied creatively and

methodically. We are not talking here of the shallow 'optimism' lampooned by Voltaire in *Candide* but a realistic commitment to improving society through direct intervention into the essential causes of misery, unhappiness, corruption and failure. In this regard, the secular enlightenment has tended to side with Pelagius, who in contrast to his great intellectual opponent Augustine, contended that sin entered through deliberate human choice without the interference or determination of original sin. Human beings were sinless and therefore perfectible through their own volition which meant taking responsibility for the commandments laid upon them by God. The rationalism of Descartes, Bacon and Leibniz work on the general understanding bequeathed by Pelagius, that humanity was not saddled indefinitely by sin, and therefore could produce good independently through its own efforts.

Descartes method is informed by this desire, and can be interpreted as wishing to recover a perfect pre-lapsarian self whose conceptual knowledge or empirical observations were not irreversibly corrupted by the fall but were perfectible through the application of the correct scientific method. The path towards self-critique to mastery and perfection out of ignorance or evil for Descartes was methodological. Accordingly, 'If we can discover the right method, if we can construct a procedure whose rules can in general be argued to produce safe or even certain results, repeatable in other experiments, at other times and places, we will have the weapon we need to master the elusive, deceptive nature.'[32] This invested human beings with an enormous sense of responsibility and conviction that nature was not a malicious punishment sent by God, but a source of wonder that could be harnessed by the individual will to achieve self-mastery over nature. It was possible to overcome the injustices of nature by experimenting with more efficient technologies to prevent the cycle of famines or the outbreak of plagues.

[32] Robert Pippin, *Modernism As a Philosophical Problem*: *On the Dissatisfaction of European High Culture*, 2 ed (London, Blackwell 1999) 23

Descartes scepticism towards the sources of knowledge was directed towards the knowledge transmitted from the Church and reliance upon scriptural authority specifically. Christianity had bequeathed a spirit of fate to human endeavour to rid themselves of immorality or to become better through their own efforts. The mood promoted by Bacon or Descartes was a confident belief that human beings could realise a future in which they are liberated from human suffering through the application of the right methods to the endemic causes of suffering. It was possible to minimise suffering in order to imagine a future emancipated from pain altogether through progress scientific medicine. In the long run, this mood of progress through increasing knowledge created further reason to reject Christian teaching on sinfulness, the origins of evil or the unreality of evil respectively. Such dogmatic notions of obligation bolstered the power and wealth of religious authorities without ever coming close to eradicating poverty or ignorance that caused moral evils.

Turning to the right method is one more pillar in the secularisation of evil. It empowers independent humanity the freedom to predict, manipulate and reshape human nature and the natural world more generally. Instead of God or the Church deciding what is evil or how evil originates, this authority and power is accepted or indeed wrested by the self-determining and self-willing subject. Blumenberg identifies this new mood as of 'self-assertion' and essential to establishing the 'legitimacy' of the modern. Blumenberg also draws an implicit connection between the problem of evil as intrinsic to the 'legitimacy of the modern' because the disappearance of order meant the fate of the good and evil no longer rests upon a divine will but evil could be removed through 'responsibility for the condition of the world relating to the future, not as an original offense in the past.'[33] The spirit of the secular is therefore Calvinist, to the extent that it represents an acceptance of salvation through the transformation of the

[33] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans Robert M Wallace (Mass, MIT press 1985) pp 137-8

secular world. This attitude of responsibility begun during the reformation is radicalised by the self-willing and self-authorising subject who with discerning the mechanical motions in nature can also use it to reshape the natural world and make inroads into those natural and moral evils that had imperilled human existence immemorially.

Conclusion

This chapter therefore concludes the historical problem of what happened to evil and how evil was transformed. It is hoped that some of the claims made in the introductions are clarified. That is, evil as a concept is not transhistorical or transcultural concept. Even within a historical investigation that is limited to Christendom and Europe we can see that there has been a significant transformation of evil from one that was grounded in robust metaphysics of form and matter to one that is replaced by the categories of religion and secular as the forming the new background to making sense of evil. Essential to making evil intelligible thorough the religion and secular is the identification of evil with individual freedom and nature that comes through the reformation and the enlightenment.

Indeed, the identification of evil with nature doesn't mean that religious understanding of evil no longer remains significant or important, particularly for believers. However, the identification of the secular with the real or natural, necessarily comes at the cost of alternative interpretations of evil that believe the intelligibility of evil comes through some connection with religion or metaphysics. The Immanent Frame of the secular operates through excluding religious ideals or conceptualisations unless they can reformulate their truths enough in order to become acceptable to a secular understanding of reality. At the same time we must be cautious by not assigning too much finality to the secular. One of the points the subsequent chapters is that the universality of the secular can be challenged despite its intellectual and political power. These voices come from religious circles as well as thinkers who are secularists

or at least secularisers and who are not entirely satisfied with the finality of worldly fullness and seek out the possibility of transcendence.

More interestingly, my essential point throughout the subsequent section is that despite the secular attempts to emancipate itself from religion there always seems to remain a residual connection to religion. There are many ways to explain this, and scholars like Carl Schmitt, Gil Anidjar or Michael Rosen use interesting terms such as ‘haunting’ ‘spectre’ or ‘replacements’ to explain the continuing presence of religion in secular life. However, the clearest reason is the category of religion is itself a creation of the secular remaking of religion for its own purposes. That is, the coming to dominance of the secular takes place as the reformulation of religion as a private, moral, apolitical and potentially divisive challenger to secular authority. This new interpretation of religion is pushed along by secular thinkers and repeated from the seventeenth century into the present. The religious survives in the secular because the secular has formulated or ‘made’ it as it’s negative inferior other. This self-understanding continues to shape everything from public discourse to disciplinary frameworks we work within today.

Part Two: The Limits of the Secular

4. Religious and Secular Violence: The Trouble with Secularism

In the first part of this thesis, we addressed the secularisation of evil, under the more general question of 'what happened to evil in a secular age?' The secularisation of evil was explained through tracing its developments through antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity respectively. During antiquity, the intelligibility of evil was grasped through the form and matter distinction and therefore understood as a form of privation of the good. In the Middle Ages, we reach something of a crisis in the comprehension of evil, this is magnified by the reformation that see's the intelligibility of evil locked between the inscrutable will of God and human beings trying to make sense of this will. This unintelligibility of evil is resolved through the formation of a new background that divides reality into the religious and the secular. The secular takes priority in this relationship and is made intelligible through being identified with nature or the real. Conceptions that were previously identified with the 'form' or the 'good.'

The aim of part two of the thesis is to focus on the intelligibility of evil in the contemporary context where the nature of the division between religion and secularity has been put under increasing scrutiny and criticism. The sudden jump into the present is justified because the intention for this thesis is both historical and philosophical. We are interested in ideas and how ideas are transformed by historical circumstances; evil, religion and the secular are produced and reproduced by agents in context-specific situations. The intention of this part of the thesis is to reflect on the *relevance* of this transformation for our contemporary period which is unhelpfully divided into polemically opposing camps of religious 'believers' and secular 'unbelievers.' The contemporary debate on secularism has been sparked by the resurgence of religion. This challenges generations of secularisations theory that predicted the decline of religion as an inevitable result of industrialisation, capitalism, science, popular sovereignty and moral autonomy. The more interesting subtext of the debate between religion and secularism is about the value of secularism as a universal political ideal (whether there is one universal

secularism, any more than there is one religion, or one evil is of course debatable). Specifically, whether its self-understanding as a neutral ideology that generally stands over metaphysical claims is itself an obstacle to dealing with religious violence, terror and intolerance. For critics, secularism doesn't have the content to affirm a bold metaphysical theory of evil. Therefore, what we are left to comprehend in the self-immolation of terrorists for the purpose of destroying others is a vocabulary of rights devoid of the good.

Finally, this part marks an evolution and not a disavowal of our interaction with Taylor's secular age. I believe there is 'crisis' of secularism and this is akin to what Taylor has described as the 'malaises of modernity.' This crisis can be understood as compelling human beings to choose a form of religious orthodoxy that is ravaged by modernity into a narrow reactionary fundamentalism or a militant naturalism or atheism that desires to purge religion from any meaningful role in public debate or decision making. This will hopefully provide the background to the subsequent chapter on the secular conceptualisation of evil, that emerged in the wake of September 11 and the general 'civilisational' struggle of values that followed.

This chapter is the first of two in this part of the thesis and it looks at the contemporary debate on the intelligibility of evil that is now understood through the division of reality into religion and the secular. The aim of this chapter is to look at the question of the intelligibility of evil through the framing of religious and secular violence. This debate has emerged in recent decades and is at its most virulent and polemical when it comes to making sense of the causes and motivations of religious violence. Indeed, suicidal terrorism where people deliberately kill themselves to kill others is the great 'unthinkable' evil that secularists believe political secularism has to confront and make sense of today. I will argue that how the framing of certain forms of violence as being specifically 'religious' and other as 'secular' is problematic. More specifically, a running theme in the interpretation of religious violence is that it is somehow symbolic and irrational. This contributes towards the particularly horrific nature of its violence

and the inexplicability of its reasons, demonstrated in the suicidal act of killing oneself in order to kill as many of the enemy as possible. What I hope to show is the assumption of religious violence as more irrational or symbolic has a genealogy in the historical memory of modern European intellectual history. This genealogy originates with the foundational role the wars have religion in the self-identity of modern secular Europe. The assumptions underlying this understanding portrays religion as prone to violence and warfare if it is allowed loose in the public sphere and therefore free to determine the public good according to its religious principles.

What is important to note is this genealogy is imbricated with the construction and idealisation of religion in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, as essentially a belief system that is private, moral and to its more vocal opponents' beliefs that are also irrational, superstitious, outdated and entirely false. The identification of religious violence as symbolic reproduces this understanding of religion as essentially irrational that lurks at some underlying cognitive level. Furthermore, this construction of religion is built on a certain self-understanding of secularism and the secular state whose purpose is to preserve the social peace that is upset when religion emerges in the public sphere and starts to make 'unreasonable' demands, in the form of more expansive rights that would challenge the private and public division that defines the modern secular state. However, what also flows from this self-understanding of the secular state as essentially *neutral* (it does not privilege or favour one substantive conception of the good life over another) is the sense that secular violence, when it does occur, is nevertheless more rational, humane, ordered and reasonably in touch with reality. This is because the motivations for secular violence are made intelligible because they rooted in the natural, social and therefore the real world. One result of this is that it tends to frame secular violence as more justifiable than religious violence because it is not motivated by

irrational or symbolic reasons but is in fact caused by real political reasons or humanitarian ideals that are dedicated to this worldly flourishing.

The aim of this chapter is to examine this binary of religious and secular violence but also challenge and critique it by showing the imbricated nature of religious and secular violence. In other words, although it is not unfeasible to think that some religious violence is motivated by some desire to please God, or enact signs revealed in a sacred text, much religious violence is also motivated by ordinary mundane secular causes like responses to neo-colonial violence, sufferings of mass poverty that are more systemic. The same is also true of secular violence, although there are often strategic or economic calculations involved in using violence and this gives secular violence a chilling nature that arguable exceeds religious violence. There is also a propensity within secularism to transcendentalise its own violence, particularly when violence is justified for the sake of 'national interests' or 'promoting freedom.' The actual distance between religious and secular violence therefore becomes difficult to discern and disentangle in these situations. Therefore, we also want to test the claim that only religious violence is 'symbolic' or 'inscrutable' are there not episode of secular violence that are also deemed 'inscrutable' or 'ineffable' and if they are how are we to make sense of them within this binary division or religion and the secular? What I hope comes out of this chapter is an understanding that the concept of secularism and for that matter related terms like the 'secular' and 'secularisation' are imbricated with the category of religion. The secular can never really escape or emancipate itself from religion, because the understanding of religion and the secular have been and continually shaped by this relationship of interaction. It is hoped that this will also provide a frame through which we can begin to understand the problems with a secular conceptualisation of evil.

This chapter will proceed through the following sections: (i) we shall briefly examine the genealogy of the idea religion as essentially violent (ii) in the this section we are going to

examine Juergensmeyer's contribution to the contemporary discussion on religious violence as essentially symbolic (iii) we shall criticise this work but more generally the problem with this binary of religious and secular violence because it rests on a deliberate construction of religion as an opponent to secular life which obscures secular that is internal to the religious and the religious that is internal to the secular (iv) to examine examples of secular violence that is incomprehensible and examine how this differs from the construal of religious in the same manner.

The Greatest (Subtraction) Story Ever Told

The aim of this section is to place the different evaluations of religious violence in comparison to secular violence in its intellectual context. These different evaluations derive from the identification of religious violence as more transcendental, symbolic and therefore irrational. This is dependent on the general construction of religion by enlightenment thinkers that religion and religious explanation of evil have to correspond with the human nature and implemented by autonomous free will. By comparison secular violence is construed as rooted in the natural and social world, meaning that it has identifiable causes or moral motivations that derive from this worldly action and therefore distinguish it from religious violence. The evaluation of secular violence is therefore related to the construal of reality by the secular as something natural and created by human action. However, this sense of secular violence as carried out by rational forethought, planning and deliberation also bequeaths upon it a degree of incomprehensibility that is more disturbing compared to the old-fashioned irrational violence perpetrated by religious actors. This is a point we shall examine in the final section, when we consider whether evil perpetrated rationally is more upsetting and whether the fact that action is justified by secularism through offering reasons and rationales makes it blind to its own evil and its own violence.

To return to our initial point, these different evaluations or religious and secular violence can be understood through the historical evolution of secular identity. The idea of a correlation between religion and violence and secularism with peace is an integral component to the 'subtraction stories' we highlighted in the introduction. Very briefly, Taylor identified subtraction stories are essential narratives that helped to explain how modern Europeans became secular modern citizens, individuals or Germans for that matter. The subtraction story helps to explain the liberation of the self, society, nature and politics from the grip of God, Christ, the saints, angels, devils and redemption. The most identifiable of these 'subtraction stories' is Weber's idea of disenchantment as occupying a central role in the story of modernity's origins and its emancipation from magic through instrumental rationality. Once magic was removed and religion became disenchanted of magic, this gave birth to secular identity. What is worth pointing out here is one subtraction story overlooked by Taylor is the one that narrates the origins of the modern secular state. This story has had a substantial impact on the construction of religion and its relationship to violence and the self-identity of the secular as the guarantor of social and political peace.

Briefly, the story goes that the reformation was responsible for undermining the theological unity of the Church by forcing the radical pluralisation of theological doctrines. This had a calamitous effect on social institutions and political structures that had been built over centuries. Following the disintegration of the 'sacred canopy' provided by the Catholic church and the reformations disintegration of Christianity into dozens of religious sects, confessions and denominations, this caused violence to spill out into over a century of warfare on the continent. The Germans Peasants War (1524-5) The French Wars of Religion (1562-98) and The Thirty Years War (1618-48) all of which resulted in millions of deaths and horrendous destruction that completely transformed the political geography of Christendom. The violence committed by sectarian groups in search of the Christian good also created the understanding

of religion as absolutist, intolerant and therefore blessed with a strong propensity toward violence to assert its metaphysical claims. To counter this propensity religion had to be privatised and the public good is made through consenting individual citizens. This connection between religious sectarianism as threatening public order lives on today in the hostility of some secular states towards the visible representation of religion and the need to exclude public display of religion from the public sphere.

What created social peace is the birth of the secular state, and the ideology of secularism that underpins the secular state. The subtraction story holds that 'the conflictual and violent nature of medieval Christian factions (often called the 'The Wars of Religion') could only be resolved by some form of disestablishment of the Church and the State.'[1] What makes this a subtraction story is that it is the modern secular state that is framed as the harbinger of peace, reason and unity. It is the secular state that resolves the problem of religious intolerance between warring theological sects through a philosophy of individual rights and moral equality. The secular state is responsible for removing the chaos unleashed by religious violence through the separation of religion and politics. The solution to religious violence came through the privatisation of religion meaning that metaphysical claims were essentially irresolvable in a state of intellectual plurality. Therefore, the gradual marginalisation of religion from public life and the reformulation of religion into a belief system that could have no involvement in the autonomous realms of 'politics' 'science' 'economics' 'morality.' Although the justification for modern secularism came during the nineteenth century, the actual groundwork for the privatisation of religion was made in the centuries prior to the nineteenth century. Firstly, the political philosophy of John Locke which preached the necessity of tolerance and the need for individual rights against the state. And secondly, the moral philosophy of Kant whose argument

[1] Richard King, 'The association of 'religion' and violence: reflections on a modern trope' in Religion and Violence in South Asia ed John Hinnells and Richard King (London Routledge 2007) 248

for the necessity and significance of religion understood religion as essentially a moral faith conforming to the precepts of practical reason.

We shall argue in the next section regarding the claim that religious violence is more irrational because it is not rooted in the real world but the symbolic realm. However, the roots for this claim are found in the historical memory of violence in Europe. This is because the perpetration of violence done for the sake of religion is assumed to have a particularly bloody, uncompromising and destructive character. Thanks to its uncompromising and absolutist truth claims. The wars of religion triggered by the reformation is part of the historical memory that finds it easy to conflate religion and extreme violence. There are more examples of religion inspiring a particular propensity towards human cruelty and seeking out to completely annihilate its enemies. The bloody nature of the crusades became topical again thanks to the contemporary wars in the Middle East and the subsequent terrorism as a response to what are seen as Christian nations occupying Muslims nations. The legacy of the Jewish pogroms or the inquisitions of heretics or witches preceding and during the wars of religion are more examples of religions fondness for bloody violence and destruction.

The essentially irrational nature of religious violence is made intelligible for secularists because it appeals to a higher or divine source to justify its actions. Indeed, the appeal to a higher source makes it easier to justify extremer forms of cruelty. Kekes writes that 'Since the nature of faith precludes appeal to reason by which disputes about the putative higher good could be settled, the disputes will persist and elicit increasingly shriller responses.'[2] Although the lines separating religion and reason or faith and reason is always in some flux, the appeal to religion is interpreted by many believers and secularists as overriding the claims of reason. The argument is that when people appeal to God or the Qur'an, they do so in way that is unyielding and uncompromising. This is because religion and certain religious claims in

[2] John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2005) 27

particular have to be accepted in their entirety. Through appealing to God or scripture one is justifying one's violence because there is an infallible source behind one's actions. This allows heretics to be burned at the steak, pouring hot oil over a temple, cutting off noses of heretics or committing suicidal bombings inside a mosque. The actions are cruel, cowardly or vengeful, but they are justifiable because they are done because religious beliefs are meant to understood in a purely absolutist way.

Against the appeal to faith, secular violence is intelligible because it appeals to reasons or motives that are derived from human nature or through a general comprehension of human action. Kant's conceptualisation of radical evil is essential in the history of cementing the importance of appealing to moral reasons or maxims of choice, in helping us understand why human violence or depravity may arise. The identification of secular reasons and secular violence introduces a comprehensibility to violence perpetrated by the secular state or indeed secular ideologies. The introduction of reason allows us to interpret human motives so that we can assign violence to revenge, envy, pride, power or greed. Indeed, this self-consciousness about being motivated by worldly reasons is important because it allows the secular agent to remain in a reflective perspective that allows it the autonomy to scrutinise its own reasons for action. Something that is not possible if one's reasons come from or are justified by a higher inscrutable source. For the believer 'the essence of faith is that it requires an effort of will to accept what to reason appears unacceptable.'[3] There are limits drawn around reason by a secularists but they are not prone to accepting this because of an infallible source. For the believer, their entire existential identity is wrapped up within their faith, meaning that any compromise, belittling or deviation from true religion is not only resisted but any action is justifiable if the meaning of religion is devalued and dishonoured.

[3] Ibid 23

Returning to the question of the subtraction story, this story has become embedded into the history memory of Europe that sets up the different evaluations of religious violence and secular violence. Essential to this memory is the Westphalian solution that marks the birth of the sovereign state which has enshrined this conviction that politics and religion ought not to be mixed for the sake of political order and social peace. The acceptance of the division of religion and the secular as opponents comes at the cost of a different evaluation placed on religious and secular violence. For many contemporary analysts' religious violence is particularly incomprehensible because it derives from an absolute metaphysical source that exists in some symbolically 'non real' realm of existence that gives it a particularly devasting quality because it is not shaped by earthly constraints and reflected in the incomprehensible action of killing oneself to kill the other.[4] However, in assigning this type of standard it has the effect of transcendentalising religious violence which is seen as motivated by symbolic or ineffable mythological reasons. By comparison, secular violence is rooted in real, human, rational causes that are backed by intelligible reasons and therefore actions that are justifiable as well as rationalisable. This different evaluation of religious violence as absolutist and unintelligible and secular violence as worldly and intelligible places so called religious violence at an ontological disadvantage and so-called secular violence, or more specifically violence done by secular states or political nationalism at an advantage. Indeed, secular violence by virtue of being worldly, real, natural and explicable through motive analysis paves the way for horrendous actions being made permissible so long as they are not religious.

[4] Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Lethal*: *The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (San Francisco, Joey Bass 2011)

Religious Violence

In the previous section we claimed that the identification of religious and secular violence is part of the historical memory of Europe. This memory allows for a common-sense relationship between religion and violence that derives from historically paradigmatic examples of religious violence (wars of religion, crusades, inquisition, pogroms etc). The intelligibility of religion and violence is consolidated by the idea that religion is driven by an uncompromising streak that is a result of its totalising religious beliefs and which creates a more violent human agent willing to kill, maim and torture for the sake of their divine beliefs. Therefore, religiously inspired violence is an extension of totalising beliefs. This is in contrast to secular beliefs which are not exempt from violence, but they are limited by their commitment to reason and a public good that is consensus-orientated which in the end desires this worldly human flourishing. The intelligibility of reasons and reason giving means that violence is not justified by some higher ineffable principle (although we shall raise this problematic in the final section) or source. Instead, the reason giving dimension also means that violence is intelligible, so that actors reasons for perpetrating violence can be understood and even corrected. The same kind of reform is not possible for believers whose actions are done in the name of God.

The aim of this section is to examine the discussion of evil in relation to religious violence provoked by the September 11 terror attacks in New York. According to Richard King 'The attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States of America by a small but well-organized group of radical Islamists has breathed new life into the now well-established association of religion and violence and brought this issue into the forefront of public discussion.'[5] Furthermore, it is also the catalyst for the contemporary debate on the secular concept of evil. In the preface to her wide-ranging study of the modern understanding of evil in modernity,

[5] Richard King 'The association of 'religion' and violence: reflections on a modern trope' in *Religion and Violence in South Asia* ed John Hinnells and Richard King (London Routledge 2007) 231

Susan Neiman points out the significance of the September 11 attack in the understanding of evil. She writes 'Yet it soon became clear that September 11 was indeed a historical turning point that would change discussion of evil.'[6] The absolute shock is perhaps difficult to register two decades later, however, all the usual words we have come to associate with evil like 'unthinkable' 'incomprehensible' 'unintelligible' 'inexpressible' were liberally applied by media headlines, politicians and commentators to make sense of its gravitas.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the most important referent for evil in the last few decades is defined in relation to religious violence and specifically suicidal terrorism. An important part of this argument is that violence is indeed motivated by a particular form of extremist religious ideology that is responsible for perpetrating such horrific actions. The former British Prime Minister Tony Blair spells this out in a speech given in 2006:

> Minsters have been advised never to use the term 'Islamic extremist.' It will give people offense. It is true. It will There are those – perfectly decent minded – people who say the extremists who commit these acts of terrorism are not true Muslims. And, of course, they are right. They are no more proper Muslims than the Protestant bigot who murders a Catholic in Northern Ireland is a proper Christian. But, unfortunately, he is still a 'Protestant' bigot. To say his religion is irrelevant is both completely to misunderstand his motive and to refuse to face up to the strain of extremism within his religion that has given rise to it.[7]

Even if religion is not irrelevant, the assumption that September 11 was straightforwardly a religious act or that suicidal terrorism is in general, religiously motivated is liable to confuse. To begin with, such acts were committed using the logistical and military training that can only be realised by within some a modern state. The sense of planning also gave the act a deliberate and very utilitarian outlook akin to the terrorism you might associate with secular groups like the Tamils tigers. Furthermore, the intentional destruction of civilians and self-destruction of symbolic targets is a form a malevolence that both religious and non-religious are guilty of

[6] Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*, xi
[7] Abdelwahab El-Affendi, 'The Terror of Belief and the Belief in Terror: on Violently Serving God and Nation' in *Dying For Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World* ed Madawi Al- Rasheed & Marat Shterin (London, Tauris 2009) 63

committing. This association of religion with violence and therefore religious violence as something incomprehensibly evil is also conceptually problematic. It rests on certain prejudicial assumptions of Islam which looks to exclude secular violence from the debate on moral evil and atrocities. According to Cavanaugh secularism 'sanctions a dichotomy between non-Western, especially Muslim, forms of culture on the one hand, which – having not yet learned to privatize faith matters of faith – are absolutist, divisive and irrational, and Western culture on the other, which is modest in its claims to truth, unitive and rational.'[8] Despite political secularism being founded on neutrality and not giving preference to one religion over another, this is not always adhered to or can be adhered to. The ideology of secularism also drove colonialism and its conception of religion as moral, spiritual and apolitical. Not only was much of the Muslim world colonised by Europe, but many observers, diplomats, missionaries and orientalists found Islam's inability or unwillingness to secularise deeply problematic. To the extent that Islam's inability modernise was the result of its theocratic character that prevented the separation of religion and politics. The basic secular justification for why September 11 attacks took place, was that it grew out of Islam's lack of secularity and in particular the desire of Islamic religious movements to implement theological absolutism into the public sphere of Muslim nations. The unintelligibility of its evil derives from the uncompromising nature of the Islamic faith being the source of the problem and the incomprehensibility of going against secularisation narrative and not dividing religion and politics.

One result of the religious and secular binary is the way it constructs religious violence as irrational or indeed incomprehensible whilst implicitly legitimising secular violence which is motivated by the nation state's freedom to wage almost limitless war for the sake of 'national

[8] William Cavanaugh, 'Colonialism and the myth of religious violence', In *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* ed Timothy Fitzgerald (London, Equinox Publishing 2007) 241

interest.' What 'national interests' means is of course contentious, often defined by poorly formed arguments, intended to confuse or misinform, so long as they are protected by legality, rules and moral limits. Furthermore, a logical concomitant to the bifurcation of religious violence and secular violence is that a different evaluation is placed on religious evil which seems to be motivated by transcendental, cosmic and other worldly goals compared to secular evil as essentially motivated by self-interested worldly goals like economic inequality, defending national strategic interests. This neglects the fact that religious violence (and therefore religious evil) is as likely to be motivated by very ordinary or indeed rational worldly concerns influenced by colonial occupation or great power rivalries that have contributed to a pathologized climate of poverty and despair. In the same manner secular violence has a propensity to transcendentalise its own goals by appealing to the 'nation' 'freedom' 'human rights' all of which are deeply contested and may realistically be construed as metaphysical conceptualisations. The way the debate is framed presents the categories of 'religion' and 'secular' as ahistorical and immutably fixed categories, isolated from each other with no historical relationship.

An important contribution to the debate on religious violence; that takes for granted the oppositional nature of 'religion' and the 'secular' is the sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer's work *Terror in the Mind of God*: *The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. This work was originally published in 2000, but the attack on September 11 encouraged a new edition with preface. This work is full of interesting empirical case studies that include interviews and analysis with the many activists and leaders of the Christian identity movements, Islamic Fundamentalists, Zionists and Sikh religious nationalists. Juergensmeyer admits that 'in many of these cases religion has supplied not only the ideology but also the motivation and the

organizational structures for the perpetrators.'[9] In lieu of Juergensmeyer conceding that it is religion that supplies the justification for violence he goes out to search for the cause that motivates believers to commit atrocities in the name of religion. Juergensmeyer writes that 'I look for explanations in the current forces of geopolitics and in a strain of violence that may be found at the deepest levels of the religious imagination.'[10] Juergensmeyer believes this strain of violence is exclusive to religion and can be made intelligible through examining acts of violence and what the perpetrators said in order to justify their actions. These justifications rely religious rhetoric and the use of religious symbolism that motivate perpetrators to blow up planes, set off chemical attacks or assassinate opponents in cold blood.

Juergensmeyer's key chapter is called 'cosmic war' whereby actors translate a religious propensity towards Manicheanism unto the social and political sphere in order to justify their violent action. On cosmic war, Juergensmeyer writes 'They evoke great battles of the legendary past, and they relate to metaphysical conflicts between good and evil. Notions of cosmic war are intimately personal but can also be translated to the social plane. Ultimately, though, they transcend human experience.'[11] The notion of cosmic war becomes the common thread that binds all religious violence, because it is 'central to virtually all of the incidents of performance violence.'[12] It connects the Christian militia in America who believe they are waging a war against a satanic federal government, to Al Qaeda for whom *Jihad* is an all-encompassing cosmological principle, to supporters of the BJP that evoke the great wars from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata* to push through their vision of a exclusively Hindu India.

According to Juergensmeyer what is particularly destructive about cosmic war is the very Manichean binary that underpins it 'On the personal level it is a conflict between faith and the

[9] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*: *The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (California, University of California University Press 2001) 5
[10] Ibid 6
[11] Ibid 149
[12] Ibid 150

lack of faith; on the social level it is a battle between truth and evil.'[13] This dualism simply doesn't merely aggravate war but prolongs it because it 'contradicts the purpose of compromise and understanding'[14] and this distinguishes it from wars between states or state actors where there 'is willingness to accept the notion that there are flaws on one's side as well as on the other side.'[15] This reasonability on the part of secular state is not possible for believers who are committed to another world or awaiting the fulfilment of this world in some grand cosmic scenario. Furthermore, when cosmic war is the goal, and the warring attitude is released or justified 'war is not only the context for violence but also the excuse for it.' There is a self-interest to be at war for as long as possible that Juergensmeyer believes 'is not rational'[16] and therefore distinguishes it from secular war that is presumably more rational because not only is compromise possible, but it avoids turning the struggle into a metaphysical drama where self-interests are sacrificed for the purpose of eternal unchanging truths.

Juergensmeyer's conceptualisation of 'cosmic war' as causing more bloodshed or prolonging violence essentially supports the view that religious violence is somehow more violent compared to secular violence which is rational and intelligible. In the next section we want to get into some of the shortcomings of Juergensmeyer's, which rely on a particular understanding of religion bequeathed by the enlightenment and is therefore culpable for some of his conclusions. Furthermore, we want to introduce the idea that this idea that secular violence is more rational, utilitarian and intelligible doesn't make it any less terrifying. What I hope this does is open the door to how secular violence, even when it is enacted by reasons, intelligible motives or political calculation falls into the same problems of incomprehensibility and unintelligibility that religion is identified with.

[13] Ibid 151
[14] Ibid 152
[15] Ibid
[16] Ibid

Religious Violence and Secular Violence

The key difficulty with Juergensmeyer's and similar works[17] is they are rooted in basic assumptions about religion and the secular that do not account for how far the religious practices and motives are shaped by secular power and authority. There is no simple way to disentangle religious motivations from secular motivations. Indeed believers, throughout history have been more than adept at appealing to God, the Torah or the Prophet to mask economic and political grievances. To say there is a strain in the human imagination that makes believers more prone to perpetrating violence and war, effectively takes believers outside the category of humanity. I don't believe it is Juergensmeyer's intention to transcendentalise the evil or indeed the violence of believers, and therefore exclude them from the rest of humanity. However, his identification cosmic war as a particular problem for religion has the effect marginalising believers by removing the cause of their violence from the realm of intelligibility. There is no doubt that some terrorism is done in the name of religion or some absolutist faith. However, Juergensmeyer's contention is broader and is making a point of religious violence as some kind of natural or psychological trait that is revived when it comes into contact with religion. Such a claim makes it difficult for religious violence to be intelligible or the reasons for religious action to be judged fairly.

Furthermore, it ought to be noted that something as contentious as religious violence also grows out of the same historical context shaped by political secularism and whose goals have been conditioned by the political or economic realities of a secular state. Notwithstanding the fact that extricating secular justifications for violence are easily blurred into religious justifications. For instance, are the reasons presented al-Qaeda being used to justify a scriptural commandment or are they really masking Islamic resentment for recurring interventions in the

[17] See Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*: *Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago, Chicago University Press 2002)

Middle East? These problems also haunt Juergensmeyer, who doesn't seem to think the Russian invasion or American armament of *Mujahideen* contributed to the formation of suicidal terrorism. Although Juergensmeyer himself admits that 'Much of what I have said about religious terrorism in this book may be applied to other forms of political violence – especially those that are ideological and ethnic in nature.'[18] Juergensmeyer though doesn't seemed to be entirely convinced with this point and looks to qualify it in the following paragraph when he writes 'What is striking about religious terrorism is that it is almost exclusively symbolic.'[19] Juergensmeyer's use of the 'symbolic' like cosmic war or the idea of martyrdom to separate religious from secular violence is supported by the details from his empirical research.

However, the notion of the symbolic can easily be used against him. Indeed, the entire lead up to the Iraq war was mired in symbols of cosmic war that were legitimised by the incumbent President's less than secular addresses to the nation. Of course, the war was waged for mundane reasons like oil, regime change and strategic dominance in Middle East, but it was also seen as a 'crusade' against an 'axis of evil.' Significantly in the blurring of justification of religious and secular violence it was difficult to discern whether the President's rhetoric invoking 'crusades' was in fact a result of his evangelicalism or the general sense of American exceptionalism as crusading beacon for democracy that permeates both conservative and liberal intellectual culture. Furthermore, can we be sure that many of the military recruits from the evangelical heartlands didn't think of themselves in a symbolic war of civilisation? Compelled to struggle for the national interest with a non-Christian enemy, when they were shooting from their tanks? Indeed, is the commitment of an American special forces personal to die for their

[18] Juergensmeyer, *Terror* 220
[19] Ibid 220

nation stronger or less symbolic than Sikh nationalists willing to carry out assassination for the purpose of creating *Khalistan*.

Certainly, the entire discussion of exporting democracy, capitalism, freedom and human rights to poor backward Arabs took on a symbolic importance co-opted by the religious right as much as the secular left. A Rand report on the prospective spread of 'liberal Islam' to balance out the propensity of violence added that

> Modern democracy rests on the values of the Enlightenment: traditionalism opposes these values... Traditionalism is antithetical to the basic requirements of a modern democratic mind-set: critical thinking, creative problem solving, individual liberty, secularism.[20]

In the process the values of the enlightenment are not only interpreted as naturally opposed to (religious) traditional ones: without recognising the contribution of Christianity and in particular the reformation in shaping these values. More significantly, the implication seems to be that the values of secularism and liberalism are not themselves the result of complex political, social and intellectual changes. Indeed, the values of secularism are just as easily assimilated into transhistorical and transcendental plane. King points out that: 'The struggle for democracy, human rights, free market capitalism, 'the American way of life', Communism, etc., all involve reference to some kind of transcendental signifier or value.'[21]

A significant part of the problem is the generic category of religion utilised to present religious violence as something other to secular violence and therefore incomprehensible. King writes that secularisation doesn't signify 'the death of religion but rather the very moment of its birth.'[22] That is, the modern category of religion also carries with it the intellectual narratives that have been foundational to the self-identity including 'the origins of 'modernity' and the

[20] Saba Mahmood, Secularism, 'Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation', *Public Culture*, Vol 18, No. 2 (2006) 334
[21] Richard King, 'The association of 'religion' and violence: reflections on a modern trope' 236
[22] Ibid 234

birth of the nation state.'[23] The most significant of these origin narratives that is promoted by the reformation and universalised from the enlightenment onwards is that religion represents a universal genus.[24] In other wordsm there is some essential feature that binds Catholic reverence to the sacraments to African voodoo, Quranic recitation and Hindu rituals. This kind of reading is implicit in Juergensmeyer's sweeping list of a symbolically unified notion of violence in the form of a'cosmic war' uniting Islamic fundamentalism, Christian identity, Sikh nationalism, BJP's communalist politics, Israeli Zionism and Buddhist occultism. What Juergensmeyer's fails to mention in his sweeping list of religions that are unified by symbolic reasons to inflict violence, is this sense of universal religion is only intelligible thanks to immense proliferation of secular violence throughout the non-Western world. The idea of religion as a universal category and therefore something that all non-Western societies possess (understood as containing some kind of spiritual deity, scripture, liturgical practices, priests, sacred days) owes an immense debt to the massive projection of colonialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The work of Christian missionaries, colonial officials, institutes and academic disciplines promoted the sense in which the non-West was dominated by religion. Its relative backwardness and traditionalism compared to the colonial power reinforced the view that this was because colonial societies were still religious. This contributed to a very redemptive narrative of uncovering the true religion of societies that fallen into superstition and ignorance. Indeed, it was central to constructing Hinduism and Buddhism on an ideal model of what religion ought to look like. The paradigmatic model was very often the religion practiced by colonising power.[25] Hinduism constructed as a singular religion as opposed to an internally

[23] Ibid 235
[24] William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) 69
[25] See Phillip Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988) Introduction and Chapter 1 and Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (London, Blackwell Publishers 1990)

plural and tradition was essential to solidifying British rule in India and gave the Indians a self-understanding of being riddled by castes. It was only the labour of British ingenuity that redeemed them by reviving original and pure Hinduism. Significantly, the construction of a singular Hinduism has also paved the way for its emergence as a politically majoritarian movement in the early twentieth century, whereby the belief in a singular unified 'Hindu' is essential to the contemporary Indian narrative of its own origins as unified religious national community.

It is ironic that colonial and therefore secular violence was used to the promote the idea religion in the colonies, a category that is also embedded in the historical memory of Europe as giving rise to violence. One important twist to this construction of Hinduism is that contemporary Hindu majoritarian violence against Muslims minority in provinces like Gujarat is the result of this re-making of religion through colonialism that enshrined a singular Hindu identity instead of the plural and syncretic identities prior to colonialism. Secular violence is therefore indirectly culpable in the immense proliferation of religious violence. Where it succeeds in masking its own possibilities for violence is often through stealth, political intelligence and a sense of forgetting its own capacity for violence. This gives secular violence a more chilling fanatical nature that is far more incomprehensible than religious violence. We have reasons and we can do anything sums of the mindset of some of secularisms fanatical calculators. This self-understanding that secular violence is more logical or is limited by practical consideration is no less frightening or bloodthirsty. Consider, Sam Harris one of the leading voices of 'new atheism' justification for the possible use of nuclear warheads against an Islamic terror state.

> There is little possibility of our having a cold war with an Islamist regime armed with long-range nuclear weapons…In such a situation, the only thing likely to ensure our survival may be a nuclear first strike of our own. Needless to say, this would be an unthinkable crime – as it would kill tens of millions of innocent

> civilians in a single day – but it may be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe.[26]

For Harris, and other sympathetically like-minded individuals in the American state department, the possibility of nuclear annihilation is mitigated or made 'thinkable' by the fact that the violence perpetrated by the secular state is a rational consequence of the irrational nature of Islamic terror and Islamic belief in general. The secularist commitment to this world seems to justify unreasonable levels of violence to be meted against those whose violence is construed as religious and therefore whose commitment to this worldly flourishing is compromised. What is pertinent is that by 'defending' our secular values like liberalism, conscience, individualism, democracy and freedom, nuclear annihilation has rational intelligible reasons. The problem of moral justification can be achieved by fear and appealing to transcendental values. A scenario Islamic terrorists would undoubtedly be able to identify with wholeheartedly.

The Incomprehensibility of Secular Violence

In the previous sections we have argued the different evaluation of religious and secular violence respectively. This is thanks to the historical memory that is associated with religious violence and the philosophy of secularism as ending cycles religious warfare. The different evaluations are underpinned and tied to the common sense meaning of religion as belief in something supernatural and the secular as rooted in reason, nature and human freedom. It has also been an implicit argument within this chapter that in the criticism directed at this memory and the common-sense conceptualisation of this binary that there is more than a degree of imbrication and entwinement between these categories. That is, religious violence is never without secular reasons or motivations, just as secular violence comes with some heavy metaphysical baggage.

[26] Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Terror and the Future of Reason* (London, W W Norton, 2004) pp 128-9

With the imbrication and entwinement of these two categories in mind, we are interested in the question of rational violence in this final section. More specifically, whether the perpetration of rational, planned or organised violence makes secular violence more incomprehensible? Not simply in the sense that violence could be committed without reason or motivation, is therefore seen as incomprehensible because we simply find it unintelligible why an actor would inflict such an act. But rather, the chilling calculated nature of secular violence is in Harris' quote on using nuclear weapons for a strategic purpose. That is, reasons are not presented as obstacles to violence or at least the limitation of violence, but in fact reasons can be used to justify violence that is as destructive, self-destructive and unlimited as anything done in the name of God or religion. Violence inflicted deliberately and with rational forethought, in which the actor is aware of the consequences of their actions and nevertheless continues with the act, also bestows an incomprehensibility to secular violence. Indeed, to know your actions will inflict suffering and to persist or reason your way through also gives secular violence a hardness and unintelligibility.

To begin with, the accusation that religious violence is exceptionally totalising or bloodthirsty can easily also be pointed back at secular violence. Faith in reason or some other secular ideology can be held with the same totalising devotion as religious faith. This is something that is demonstrated repeatedly in the worst atrocities in the twentieth century. The paradigmatic case for secular violence in the twentieth century is the holocaust. The careful application of practical rationality towards eradicating the Jewish problem was central to Nazi antisemitism. This reinforces the cold rationality of secular violence, and the rationality of secular evil. In Daniel Goldhagen's analysis, Nazi Jewish policy highlighted its practical utility because it involved 'a concerted yet flexible and necessarily experimental attempt, born of conscious intent, to eliminate putative Jewish power and influence as thoroughly and finally as

possible.'[27] The goal of removing any traces of Jewish memory also filtered down into society as comprehensively as any religious faith. Goldhagen goes on to add that 'No significant aspect of German society was untouched by anti-Jewish policy; from the economy, to society, to politics, to culture, from cattle farmers, to merchants, to the organization of small towns, to lawyers, doctors, physicists, and professors.'[28] The rational intent to commit violence combined with infiltration of racism into every level society therefore created the toxic conditions for removing any limits on violence. For example, Browning's study examines the actions of Reserve Police Battalion 101 and their contribution to the Final Solution. The work tries to explain the fact that 'In mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse.'[29] Ostensibly, one conclusion to draw from this data is that the holocaust was something that lasted for a short period of time but was incredibly violent and bloody in that short period.

Yet the conflation of absolutist practical rationality and bloody violence against the Jews only tells us part of the story of how the supposed rationality of secular violence is more humane because it relies on reason or reason giving. The Nazi leadership didn't always rely on brute force or ideological propaganda to push through their policies. Indeed, the goal of destruction needed too many dirty hands from bureaucratic machinery, financial organisations and scientific institutes to participate in such an unthinkable enterprise. The use of reasons in this regard was particularly cruel on victims who became complicit in their suffering. The rationality of secular violence also works because it succeeds in persuading its victims through giving it reasons on the futility of opposition and the importance of self-interest against any

[27] Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Abacus, 1997) 132
[28] Ibid 8
[29] Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London, Penguin 1989) xiii

claim to morality or the appeal to some higher good. Bauman writes that 'By and large, all rulers can count on rationality being on their side. But the Nazi rulers, additionally twisted the stakes of the game so that the rationality of survival would render all other motives of human action irrational.'[30] Convincing people to accept their fate by offering reasons why it is in their interest to accept non-resistance for the sake of survival is tidier than reckless violence. This side of secular violence reminds us of the flexibility reason and the ability to harness reasons against the victims' own fears in order to facilitate their own destruction.

In this regard, secular reason can be understood to exceed religious reason in their capacity for incomprehensible violence. Religious reasons have a symbolic component that can transcendentalise opponents or enemies into a 'cosmic war' scenario. Yet religious are also inflexible and rigid because they are limited by clear and absolute commands that are given by God or scripture. Not only does this result in absolute prohibitions against killing or the excessive pursuit of torture but there is very little wiggle room for creative hermeneutics that would allow for some compromises to be made. In the sense of a utilitarian calculator whereby killing or allowing a few to die in order to save greater number is made permissible. Of course, this hasn't prevented believers in indulging in torture or justifying sadistic violence against alleged heretic or unbelievers, yet religious reasons are supported by clear commandments that limit unjustifiable violence. As a result, consequentialist or loosely utilitarian logic is one that is not necessarily binding or foundational when it enters into the thinking of religious reasoning. Not that utilitarian thinking is completely representative of secular reasoning, or moral justifications, but there are precedents, sometimes justifiable, that allow reasons to be given which allow the slaughter of the many to save a few more. The scenario given by Sam Harris is one of these situations in which secular reason giving can be exploited by the state or politicians in order to stoke the fear of self-preservation and survival which compels the state

[30] Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (London, Polity 1989) 203

to perpetrate even greater violence. The Nazis used the same logic and tactic to make Jewish councils complicit in their own destruction and this gives secular violence a level of incomprehensibility that exceeds religious violence.

What I am not suggesting is that secular violence is more violent than religious violence. I am doubtful that we can say with any certainty that one is more violent than the other. Nevertheless, there is a common-sense belief that is worth challenging and therefore banishing and that is secular violence will always be less extreme because it fundamentally respects this life as the only life that we share. An argument along these lines has recently been articulated by Martin Hägglund in his work *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*.[31] Hägglund's key argument seems to be that because religious belief entails the belief in another world, a believer's commitment to this worldly flourishing is always circumscribed. One reasonable deduction to make here is the devaluation of the secular world and the believers lack of full commitment to it also creates a willingness to perpetrate unlimited violence. This is in contrast to secularists who recognise that we share one single world and there is nothing better awaiting humanity after death. Such an attitude compels secularist to make the most of this world, to value flourishing and the flourishing of subsequent generations as the overriding value that secularists devote themselves to.

I find Hägglund's argument compelling, that is if I have understood it properly. My objection to his belief that this worldly flourishing is what matters above all else is what are the costs to build this worldly utopia? And who bears this cost (migrants, minorities or the environment) and what kinds of violence (human trafficking, mass unemployment, war or humanitarian intervention) are intrinsic to building this utopia on earth? And what about those who are opponents of this utopia, do they not suffer the fate of marginalisation, exclusion and

[31] See Martin Hägglund *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (New York, Anchor Books 2019) pp 3-36

worthy of violence? Hegel pointed out the negative consequences modern progress, warning that history was 'the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized.'[32] The terror that had begun with the Bastille was justified because it was necessary for creating the kind of society that has never existed. Hägglund's belief that this life is what matters seems also to forget the cruelty and violence that has followed in the wake of enlightened efforts to institute the good and rationalise a utopian society.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the problem of religious and secular violence as a window into the broader question of evil in a secular age that we shall tackle in the following chapter. The chapter proceeded by showing that there is a different evaluation assigned to religious and secular violence respectively. That is, religious violence is more commonly interpreted as being more extreme, fanatical and absolutist. This is something that has been reinforced by the contemporary phenomenon of suicidal terrorism. By contrast, secular violence is generally understood as more rational, intelligible and therefore less extreme. These different evaluations of religious violence are underpinned by two important points. Firstly, the naturalised opposition between religion and the secular. In this relationship, the secular is identified with the natural and religion with the metaphysical, religious violence is therefore understood as more violent because it is derived from a metaphysical source and secular violence is intelligible on accounts of its rootedness in the world of natural causes, motivations, reasons and human freedom. Secondly, these evaluations are historically embedded in Europe's historical memory and through historical episodes of religious violence we assume that religion is more violent.

[32] G W F Hegel, *Lectures On The Philosophy Of History*, trans J Sibree (London, George Bell and Son, 1894) 35

What I have tried to show through this chapter is that the claim that religion is more violent, and secular is less violent, or its violence is humane, is misleading and in fact obscures attempt to make sense of violence and the question of evil more generally. In particular, the claim that secularism is less violent because it is not absolutist or totalising is wrong. Secularism or ideologies that are vehicles for secularism can be as totalising, violent and uncompromising as any religious faith. Moreover, the pragmatic use of reason and reasons in the justification of violence gives the secular violence a chilling cruelty that often exceeds religious reasons, which are for good or worse governed by absolute commandments. In this regard, secular violence can be interpreted as giving birth to more incomprehensibility regarding evil. For instance, why are intelligent, rational and autonomous individuals willing to commit such horrific deeds? This problematic will be examined in the final section of this thesis when we discuss Kant and Arendt concepts of radical and the banality of evil attempt to discuss why ordinary and rational human beings people deliberately reject morality and participate in evil. My more general objection to the demarcation of religious and secular violence is there is never a simple or easy separation between these categories. They are imbricated, we saw that in how colonialism helped to invent the category of Hinduism in India and how this category is used by Juergensmeyer to distinguish religious and secular violence. My point is there is always a residual trace or shadow of the religious inside of the secular. It is a relationship that can never free itself from. The next chapter will look more closely at this problem with respect to the contemporary urge to define an autonomously secular conception of evil.

5. The Problem with a (Secular) concept of Evil

In the previous chapter we analysed the problem of religious and secular violence, and specifically, how religious violence has been construed by secular discourse as something beyond mere wrongdoing, and in fact exceptionally bloodthirsty. It was additionally argued in this chapter, that the perceived extremity of religious violence and intolerance also has much to do with the historical memory of religion in Europe. And how this memory has contributed to religion being constructed by secular discourse as totalising, absolutist and even irrational. Against this negative assessment of religion, we highlighted the extent to which this construction provided a nice contrast to secularism and secular self-understanding. A self-understanding, that allowed secular violence to be brought into the space of the reasonable, intelligible and comprehensible. This self-presentation of secular violence as ineluctably more reasonable, and even responsible for furthering social peace is something we took issue with.

What we want to do in this chapter is turn to the contemporary debate on discerning a purely secular concept of evil. This is a problematic that has emerged and accelerated in the two previous decades. The debate on the concept of evil is distinguishable from debates on the problem of evil that take place within the philosophy of religion. The aim in these debates is to examine how far we can speak intelligibly about a God that is still benevolent, even if suffering or pain are permanent fixtures of existence. Contributors are therefore interested in whether evil undermines the existence of God and religious assertions made on behalf of God. Contrary to this, the contemporary debate on the concept of evil is more aggressively secularising. That is, it takes it as axiomatic that religious claims about evil are essentially supernatural that ought to be dusted away. It is interested in examining, what is the nature of evil? what is an evil act? Is evil an explanatory concept? how to do we understand evil feelings, and so on.

This chapter therefore examines an important debate within the broader debate on the intelligibility of a concept of evil and that is whether we can have a secular concept of evil.

Although, the debate over the secular concept of evil is only one side of the debate to make evil intelligible, it also orientates and predetermines how we think about explaining evil or indeed, defining an action as evil. The conceptual level must therefore be a religion-free zone in the intelligibility of evil. What I will argue in this chapter is that an ideal of a secular concept of evil that is completely free of religion is problematic. This is not because evil is irreducibly religious or supernatural, but because a secular concept of evil cannot but draw in some reference to religion, or some reference to religious belief into the basic structure of the concept of evil. More specifically, evil has become identified by the participants of this debate with the magical, metaphysical, spiritual and supernatural. This owes a lot to what Taylor describes as 'substraction stories.' These are narratives of self-understanding that try to explain (or remind) secular Europeans why they are secular and how they arrived at this juncture. The most famous of these stories is Weber's idea of 'disenchantment' and how it bequeaths a self-understanding of the secular as banishing the old God, spirits or magic, only to be replaced by human freedom and nature. We shall argue that this self-understanding of disenchantment is what also underpins the secular concept of evil, as it tries to banish the connection between evil, religious belief and metaphysics. What the secular concept of evil points to is a deeper stage in the disenchantment of evil. As a result, the intelligibility of evil is broken down into smaller units of analysis; explanation, evil action, evil character, evil motives or evil feelings. Meaning that any reference to religion or metaphysics is completely drained from them. We cannot hope to examine each one these to make our argument more comprehensive, but we can show for instance how the question on the incomprehensibility of evil, has for instance, been severed from religious connotations and brought exclusively within the context of secular reason(s).

I believe the secularising or disenchanting rationality of the secular concept of evil can be made intelligible if we understand the context into which this discourse of evil enters. In particular, we are interested in highlighting questions regarding the legitimacy of secularism,

and a sense of crisis to its universalising claims, as triggering the contemporary debate on the concept of evil. What I hope to show in the course of this chapter is that despite the search for a secular concept of evil and the assumptions that ground such a concept. It cannot always be understood in opposition to religion. More specifically, a secular concept of evil relies on making assumptions on the nature of religion and the content of its beliefs as something essentially supernatural. In this respects, a secular concept of evil is always inflected with the kind of religion it denies, or the kind of religion it defines itself against. The secular concept of evil therefore draws upon a Christian genealogy for making evil intelligible. One consequence of this failure to emancipate evil from religious unintelligibility is to eliminate evil altogether as a concept.

This chapter is divided into several sections that attempts to give some depth and clarity to the debate on the secular concept of evil and how it represents further disenchantment: (i) we shall examine the disappearance of evil from secular discourse before it's contemporary revival; (ii) this section examines the question of the disenchantment of evil by the concept of evil; (iii) subsequently we shall look at one important dimension of this contemporary revival and that is the secular concept of evil as advanced by Luke Russell; (iv) then we shall examine why we need a secular concept of evil and what are the assumptions behind this demand (v) finally we return to the question of explaining how evil can be differentiated from other moral concepts and how the inability to do so has led some scholars deciding we must give up on evil as an intelligible secular concept altogether.

The Disappearance of Evil

Briefly, after the end of the Second World War, most European societies underwent a prolonged secularisation. Declining Church attendances, coupled with increasing openness to experimentation with non-Christian religion, reinforced the 1960's 'cultural revolution.' The secularisation of society was repeated elsewhere including the universities. This doubtlessly

affected how a notion as quaint as 'evil' was perceived within an increasingly secular academic environment. For instance, the psychologist Fred Katz writes that 'Evil was not a topic we took seriously during my graduate-student days. Evil seemed to be of concern only to religious fundamentalists and professional philosophers, and not to those of us who were trying to understand people's social behaviour scientifically.'[1] The presumption that evil meant something religious and therefore something outmoded was assumed in other social science disciplines. The sociologist Michel Wieviorka echoes the comments made by Katz by stating how sociological orthodoxy had eliminated religious conceptions when explaining social phenomenon. He writes that in 'breaking with faith and beliefs as an explanation of social life and refuting more broadly any meta-social principles of analysis, whether it be a question of God or of Nature, the traditional social sciences eliminated evil as an explanatory principle.'[2] Bruce Haddock, in a recently edited work on evil and political theory has also echoed a similar sentiment on the disappearance of evil from academic discourse. He admits that 'While there is a small (but growing) philosophical literature on evil, political theory has not revisited the idea systematically.'[3]

The extent to which evil has disappeared from academic and social discourse rather than become assimilated into other discourses on crime, genocide, terrorism, psychopathologies or moral harm is something we ought to take note of. What is accurate to assert is that evil as a moral, logical and existential 'problem' has predominantly occupied philosophers of religion and theologians in the second half of the twentieth century. In general, traditional philosophical areas like epistemology or the social sciences haven't given the concept of evil much serious attention.

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[1] Fred Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil* : *A Report on the Beguiling's of Evil* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press 1993) 2
[2] Michel Wieviorka*, Evil.* (Cambridge, Polity 2012) 1
[3] Roberts Haddock, Peri Roberts and Peter Such, *Introduction* In *Evil in Contemporary Political Theory*, Bruce Haddock, Peri Roberts and Peter Such (eds) (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011) 1

Nevertheless, one of the unintentional results of September 11 has been an academic revival in the concept of evil and specifically, as we have seen, in the guise of religious evil, a dimension of wrongdoing above and beyond anything bad or outrageous. Scholars like Eve Garrard, Susan Neiman, Luke Russell, Adam Morton, Alan Schrift, Michel Wieviorka, Paul Formosa, Richard Bernstein, Daniel Haybron, Todd Calder and Marcus Singer have used philosophical, psychological and historical analysis to understand evil conceptually. It is no coincidence that several of these scholars reference the importance of the New York attacks and the subsequent war on terror as signifying the return of evil as a broader moral intellectual problem. Indeed, we need to think carefully about the context into which this debate on the concept of evil is entering. In particular, the resurgence of global religion and the extent to which this has created a sense of crisis within secularism and the secularisation narrative. I don't think this is a radically controversial claim. In the sense that it would be an oversight to comprehend Arendt's banality of evil without giving some consideration to totalitarianism.

It follows that the context in which the contemporary discourse of evil enters into is not entirely comfortable with the language of evil unless it is religious. Neiman hints at this when she reflects on the significance of September 11 as signifying the re-emergence of evil as an existential problem as opposed to a purely academic one.

> For a day or so after the catastrophe, language itself seemed useless. At midday on September 12, CNN showed silent pictures above running band of caption: NO COMMENT NO COMMENT NO COMMENT NO COMMENT NO COMMENT NO COMMENT.[4]

The inexpressibility of words to articulate the feelings of shock and despair displayed by American media and affirmed by Neiman was the instinctive response of everyone who witnessed the carnage of the twin towers collapsing into a blaze. Nevertheless, the inexpressibility toward horrific events is a problem for secular modernity, whose self-

[4] Susan Neiman, *Evil* 283

understanding is built on making things intelligible through reason, whilst also taking a measured attitude towards atrocity. There is, you might say an anxiety within secularism that having devalued religious truth for the sake of tolerating a plurality of moral standpoints for the sake of social peace, it is no longer able to express or give real meaning to atrocity beside a meek sense of disapproval. Rowan Williams observes.

> Secularism fails, and fails dangerously, to allow room for the inaccessible in what we perceive; it can become the vehicle for the most monumentally uncritical political practices in human history, to the degree that it reduces questions of justification to instrumental ones. 'Making the trains run on time: whether they are going to Eden or Auschwitz.[5]

This palpable feeling included the view that secular values had to some extent failed. Although what it failed at was deeply contested. Nevertheless, it seemed to unite both the right and left in Western countries in the aftermath of September 11. Giving rise to a kind of 'hawkishness' within liberalism and the need to affirm secularism and secular values against an act that was seemingly done with the blessings of religion. The result is that the concept of evil has undergone a kind of secular assertion or more specifically a kind of rigorous disenchantment. Where evil is interpreted as essentially religious but can be 'redeemed' if it undergoes a kind of 'purification' that absolves itself of religious ideas or concepts.

The Disenchantment of Evil

What we want to highlight in this section is how the concept of evil marks another stage in the disenchantment of evil. What is meant by disenchantment is the loss of grip of religion or the spiritual upon the subject that is pushed along by the standard narratives of secularisation. I am, however, not suggesting that evil has only undergone disenchantment now, rather it was brought within the context of nature and human freedom since the seventeenth century. What the current discourse of evil represents is an intensification of the disenchantment evil and this

[5] Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* pp 18-19

has to do with the perceived threat of religion entering into a secular space. This is demonstrated in the manner by which evil as a concept is made intelligible through being broken down into smaller units of analysis without any reference religion altogether. Perhaps the most significant example of disenchantment is the question over the incomprehensibility of evil. Conventionally, the incomprehensibility of evil united secular philosophical thinkers and religious thinkers. There was a point to religious and secular discourse in which the intelligibility of evil seemed to exceed understanding. A general acknowledgment that words are sometimes inadequate to comprehend some events or actions. This is no longer as true because terms like incomprehensibility of evil can be considered to transcendentalise evil by moving it above and beyond history. The incomprehensibility of evil is therefore considered intelligible to the extent that it can be explained. Even the worst atrocities have causes or motives that are intelligible to reason, or by discerning motives that are fairly consistent in human nature. And to that extent, the incomprehensibility of evil is really a failing of reason to identify the reasons behind human action.

To be clear, we are not falling into an ontological or epistemological analysis of evil, but claiming how the contemporary debate on the concept of evil represents a form of disenchantment. This disenchantment moves by removing barriers to the intelligibility of evil in the broadest sense. Including what is an evil action, evil feelings or what distinguishes a wrongdoer from an evil person. The goal is to turn evil into an explanatory concept, so that the concept of evil is used to explain every terrible event or actions in the world. In the same way one would use the concept justice, freedom or equality to make intelligible moral judgements.

What is significant for us is the conceptualisation of evil marks a certain self-understanding by secularists that every aspect of the concept evil has to be expunged from any connection to religion. The increased level of disenchantment can be gleaned from some of the comments made by the contributors to this debate. They believe that the removal of religion or

metaphysics is necessary to the intelligibility of evil. Garrard's article seems intent on persuading 'purely' secular thinkers that a concept free of religious commitment is the way forward.

> For those who have the appropriate theological commitments, the term 'evil', with its supernatural or even Satanic connotations, is not distinctively problematic - it inherits such problems as that general metaphysical context presents, but it finds its natural home there. But purely secular thinkers also feel the need to use this term; they too want to mark off certain kinds of actions as special, as qualitatively different from more ordinary kinds of wrongdoing.[6]

Garrard develops a highly original theory of evil as 'metaphysical silencing' in order to persuade 'purely secular thinkers' to adopt a secular conception of evil. Todd Calder also makes a similar point to that of Garrard warning that 'One reason the term evil is thought to be ambiguous is that it may carry with it questionable metaphysical commitments to Satan, dark forces, or the supernatural, which are not made explicit, or are concealed.'[7] Fair enough, but I can only think that this understanding of evil exists because of certain assumptions about religion as supernatural or irredeemably irrational that travels from the atheistic section of the enlightenment to the contemporary context. What is interesting is the mood of disenchantment is applied not just to the concept of evil but the historical discourse of evil. Calder's article on whether Augustine's privation theory is dead implies how the secular understanding of evil has superseded the Augustinian theory of evil. He concludes his essay by stating that:

> Since non-privation theories capture the nature of evil better than privation theories and since privation theories are no better at solving the problem of evil than some non-privation theories, there is no reason for contemporary philosophers to revive the privation theory of evil. The privation theory of evil should be put to rest.[8]

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[6] Eve Garrard 'Evil as an Explanatory Concept', *The Monist*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (April 2002) 322
[7] Todd Calder, 'The Apparent Banality of Evil: The Relationship between Evil Acts and Evil Character' *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 34 No. 3 (Fall 2003)178
[8] Todd Calder, 'Is the Privation Theory of Evil Dead? *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.44, No. 4 (Oct 2007) 379

There is no discussion on the significance of the secular in the formation of religion. The writers examined tend to assume that once we remove religion, God and offer non-religious reasons for evil action; we shall be left with a demythologised and de-transcendentalised secular concept of evil. This of course reinforces the identification of religion as concerned only with supernatural. The secular is shaped by the idea of the state as having the power to remove religious opposition, this also finds its way through the power of the secular to naturalise intellectual categories. This is the same for evil.

Indeed, an illustrative example of this power to naturalise or disenchant categories is the debate on the incomprehensibility of evil or more specifically whether some actions or events ought to be called incomprehensible. What is worth noting is although we generally associate words like 'incomprehensible' 'ineffable' or 'inscrutable' with religious thinkers, it has been used by non-religious and secular thinkers. This ought not be seen as contradicting our point in the previous chapter that the ineffable is identified by the secular as exclusively religious. The secular according to Taylor also creates 'cross-pressures', that is individuals and intellectual movements who are not easily categorised into either religion or secular categories. Perhaps the most significant example of non-religious thinkers using evil in the sense of the incomprehensible is debates on the 'uniqueness' of the holocaust.

Reflecting on what Auschwitz meant for religious and secular theodicies, the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas speculated 'The "quality" of evil is this non-integratability, if we can use such a term; this concrete quality is defined by this abstract notion. Evil is not only the non-integratable; it is the non-integratability of the non-integratable.'[9] Levinas prose isn't always the most lucid, but it appears to hint at the sense of evil as an excess that proves inassimilable to secular reason. A similar sentiment is also expressed by numerous other Jewish

[9] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Evil' in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans Alphonso Lingis (Boston, Martinus Nijhoff 1987) 180

writers who were not particularly religious but made use of the incomprehensible to make sense of the singular horror of the holocaust. Elie Wiesel preferred to state "Auschwitz cannot be explained" because "the Holocaust transcends history" and the "The dead are in possession of a secret that we, the living, are neither worthy of nor capable of recovering."[10] In this manner, the philosopher Emil Fackheim also interprets the historical ineffability of the holocaust, arguing it 'as unique: as anti-Jewish not accidently but essentially; and as a *novum* in the history of evil.'[11]

The concern behind statements on the unique and incomparable status of the holocaust is the cruelties and humiliations inflicted upon the Jews falls outside the comprehensibility of understanding and the explicability of language itself. The Marxist philosopher Alan Badiou argued that such attempts to demonise the Nazi meant 'the extermination and the Nazis are both declared unthinkable, unsayable, without conceivable precedent and posterity – since they define the absolute form of Evil.'[12] Transcendentalising evil also distances it from us, and disenchantment brings it closer. However much the incomprehensible personal trauma narrated by Primo Levi and Jean Amery was, it was set against a context of practices like totalitarian decisionism, pseudo racial science, social indifference and instrumental cruelty. And so taken even at a low level of comprehensibility, the content of that grief is relatable. Words have their moorings in social interactions which means suffering is intelligible even when it is unjustifiable. The idea of incomprehensibility of evil or indeed the uniqueness of the holocaust threatens to close debate and give it an air of finality to what evil means or what perspective suffering can be looked at from. The disenchantment of evil by bringing it within the

[10] Dan Margushak, "The 'Incomprehensibility' of the Holocaust: Tightening up Some Loose Usage," *Judaism* 29, No. 2 (1980) 233
[11] Emil Fackenheim "The Holocaust and Philosophy." *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol 82, No. 10 (1985) 506
[12] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil,* trans. Peter Hallward (London, Verso 2001) pp 62-3

intelligibility of language is understood as a net positive that brings us closer to the causes of evil and what can be done to prevent it in the future.

Indeed, disenchantment seems to be the mood behind Luke Russell's article *Evil and Incomprehensibility*. Russell eschews the idea that so so-called incomprehensible evil cannot be rendered intelligible through secularist explanation. He writes that 'we have no reason to conclude that evils are wrong actions whose causes cannot be identified, nor should we believe in judging an action we block the identification of its causes.'[13] The question of 'uniqueness' or 'unimaginable' therefore becomes part of the problem from the perspective of a sceptical theorist like Russell. The incomprehensibility of evil comes to stand for something religious or metaphysical and is concealed in the articulation of some events as 'unimaginable' 'impossible' or 'inexplicable.' However, the reasons or causes behind any atrocity or any horrific event in general are not outside the rational analysis. The claim that the holocaust is 'unique' or 'unthinkable' can be re-interpreted as meaning something as conventional as that we cannot imagine why normal rational people would do. The empirical fact is that they did, it is the responsibility of the secular theorist not to sacralise it by denoting it as unthinkable but make it intelligible by examining its causes.

The unthinkability thesis of the holocaust therefore folds under the cold light of reason as soon as we describe its basic features. The holocaust is at least comparable to the Armenian genocide or subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia or Rwanda. All of these horrific events fit basic patterns like the use of *state administration for terror*; establishing *camps for internment*, *ideological dehumanisation* of the victims and *self-denial of perpetrators*. My intention, however, is not to decide that the holocaust is evil, incomprehensibly evil or indeed impossible, but to clear up my claim on the disenchantment of evil as something that is essential to the discourse of evil that has emerged post September 11. We haven't given an exhaustive

[13] Luke Russell, 'Evil and Incomprehensibility', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol 36 (2012) 67

account of this but the debate on the incomprehensibility of evil (interpreted variously as unthinkable, ineffable, impossible or imaginable) is significant, because it retains a sense of the religious or metaphysical. Therefore, bringing incomprehensible evil actions into the purview of causes and facts is a significant step towards the further disenchantment and therefore secularisation of evil.

A Secular Concept of Evil

In this section we shall present an important attempt to interrogate and conceptualise a secular concept of evil. This by Luke Russell, who attempts to develop a secular concept of evil that rests upon a kind of 'accommodative secularism' that is open to atheists and theists. However, any actual reference to any religious understanding of evil is drained out. My objection to Russell is not so much the correction of his reformulation of evil but rather his discourse of what evil is, also rests on certain judgements about what religion is, and this is rooted in the secular construction of religion. Additionally, his conceptualisation that evil is essentially a moral concept, forgets to interrogate how much of the Christian legacy runs through secular moral concepts.

Luke Russell's work *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* is an exhaustive account on the concept of evil. The overriding aims of the work are stated clearly in the opening chapter where he writes that my 'modest aim is to show that evil is no more metaphysically odd or problematic than wrongness, justice, or generosity' and therefore 'Perhaps it is best to say that I will offer a secular account of evil.'[14] It is also clear that his work is a response to the political climate. He points out 'President George W Bush's polarizing opinion in his 2002 State of the Unition address, when he described Iraq, Iran and North Korea an "axis of evil."'[15] His argument rests on a 'conceptual' analysis that looks to discover the meaning and application of evil. Although

[14] Luke Russell, *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2014) 10
[15] Ibid 1

evil 'is a highly contested word' as Russell admits, he isn't willing to follow this intuition and consider that evil may not be a transcultural concept and this is because he insists that his aim is to answer, 'questions concerning the nature of evil, and to show that the concept of evil has a legitimate place in contemporary moral thought.'[16]

Russell's focus is to develop a concept of evil that transcends divisions that are seemingly indicative of 'an exclusively religious concept such as sin'[17] and therefore try to find an accommodationist concept of evil that 'is available for use by theists and atheists.'[18] Although, Russell admits 'the word "evil" makes many people think of religion',[19] he also qualifies this claim by pointing out that 'not everyone who believes that evil exists is thereby committed to a religious worldview.'[20] Instead, his intention is to develop a secular concept that rests on an accommodationist kind of secularism that both atheists and theists can affirm and is therefore closer to its real nature.[21] As a result he sets himself the ambitious task of defining a secular concept of evil that counters its abuse by politicians and is broad enough to satisfy the scepticism of atheists and the dogmatism of believers. However, the brevity of his ambition seems to look counterproductive.

To begin with Russell wants to show that evil is not exclusively a religious concept but something that can be universally affirmed by secularists. However, the idea of a secular concept that is open to believers, secularists, atheists and theists is underpinned by an exclusively secular metaphysics. Russell goes onto to privilege his own methodological atheism by proposing that his goal is 'to defend a kind of realism about evil; a realism that is compatible with a broadly naturalistic worldview.'[22] At the same time he wants to allay fears

[16] Ibid
[17] Ibid 2
[18] Ibid
[19] Ibid 11
[20] Ibid
[21] Ibid 9
[22] Ibid pp 9-10

that he may be doing a disservice to presumably religious believers who are put off by the 'kind of narrow or austere naturalism which would demand that, if evil exists, it must be reducible to that which is the subject matter of the physical sciences.'[23] However, distinguishing a secular concept of evil that is suitable for persons who do not believe in a supernatural God and those who still to do begins to look shaky on closer analysis.

The main argument of Russell's chapter on the secular concept of evil is to 'undermine the conditional claim that evil exists only if God or other supernatural agents exist.'[24] With this he can bring atheists and even agnostics into believing in a secular concept of evil. There are difficulties with this approach that are often indicative of secularism and its propensity to divide believers into good and bad ones you might say. That is, whilst affirming a secular concept of evil is a challenge for atheists, this doesn't entail as a great a metaphysical sacrifice for atheists. The same is not true for theists or believers. Problematically, Russell also fails to define theist, even though he uses it repeatedly. Therefore, we are left to think that Russell dismisses the difference between an evangelical Christian's understanding of evil and one from the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. Problematically, to sign up to Russell's secular moral concept of evil; believers or theists are expected to participate in the illusion that God doesn't exist. In other words, the signing up to a secular concept of evil seems to place the burden unfairly against religious believers. For many 'theists' the notion of evil is only intelligible if it's embedded in a framework that gives all their other values meaning. For many believers' religious commandments that demarcates evil, cannot be divorced from the metaphysical nature of the world.

We can of course qualify this argument by inferring that Russell is really appealing to enlightened secular believers. The type who treat religion as a private morality and are not

[23] Ibid 10
[24] Ibid 12

restricted by dogma when making political decisions. Even here there are difficulties because the burden seems to be placed more unfairly upon enlightened theists. That is, even if Russell's ideal theist is a religious rationalist able to consider evil as an extreme wrongdoing, they still have to find some kind of mental compartment for what they have been taught theologically to believe, unless they reject it entirely. This involves a certain amount of cognitive dissonance because a secular rational belief of evil as a harm, has to exist alongside evil as something more comprehensive, say like a notion of sin. A religious rationalist has to hold onto a religious and a secular conceptualisation of evil within the same 'head space', which you might think cannot work except through some flexible hermeneutics or outright self-deception. More significantly, the same demand of dividing the self is not placed upon the atheists, they are not expected to affirm some trace of the supernatural in order to develop a commensurable understanding of evil. In sum, the simple disenchantment of religious conceptualisation of evil is more problematic at the practical level.

I do not want to challenge the idea that there is nothing essentially religious or indeed supernatural about evil rather than focusing on whether there is a specific quality that makes evil as supernatural or essentially religious. I would suggest that it would be more beneficial to examine first the categories of religion and the secular together, to see why it is that we find ourselves compelled to associate religion and evil, even in the formation of a wholly secular concept of evil. To begin with Russell's secular moral concept of evil relies on a usage of religion that carries the marks of Euro-Christian theological debates that were radicalised by the enlightenment critique of religion. It is not a new idea but worth reiterating and that is the idea of having or possessing morality is rooted in a Christian and broadly Protestant genealogy. This argument was relentlessly pursued by Nietzsche, who saw in compassion, egalitarianism and individualism as effectively Christianised secular moralities trying to save the world from nihilism. Anscombe also saw in the desire to develop a rule-based morality a distinctively

Protestant exercise in gaining salvation. In particular, how Christian conceptions of God as a lawgiver imposed itself on notions such as 'obligation' or 'ought.' This became deeply embedded in the language so that even when the Christian context had disappeared the Christian sense of being 'bound' to some higher rule remained.[25] We put this question as something that is not really tackled by Russell, who wants to develop secular *moral* concept of evil without addressing how much a such a concept of evil will be inflected by Christian morality. Russell seems to believe that all a secular moral concept of evil needs is it sever the connection to a supernatural with God. However, I believe he simplifies this and ought to have considered how far a secular *moral* concept of evil is not simply a Christian moral concept of evil but without a supernatural God behind such claims.

The role of Christianity is also noticeable in his basic understanding of religion as compromising a set of beliefs. It is important to appreciate that the construction of religion by the enlightenment was understood predominantly as beliefs or a belief system. These were placed in often propositional forms that were either proved or disapproved as one would any linguistic or logical statement. Russell adopts this propositional form of argumentation for his 'naturalistic argument for error theory about evil.' This is placed in three propositions (i) Evil exists only if God or other supernatural agents exist. (ii) God and other supernatural agents do not exist. Therefore, (iii) Evil does not exist. His counterintuitive move is to prove the existence of evil without disproving God; so that evil can be justified as a concept that is independent of the existence of God. The important point is that the form of argumentation derives from a particular construction of religion by secular modernity as rooted in beliefs – propositional attitude to supernatural contents - and need to be proved as such. Russell's understanding of religion therefore takes a specifically Euro-Christian dimension that understands religion as formed of a belief system that is made up of propositions that can either be proved or disproved

[25] G E M Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy*, Vol 33, No. 124 (Jan 1958) pp 4-5

as supernatural as universal phenomenon. And it turns out to be a nice foil through which, and against which, he that defines his universal secular concept of evil.

The important point is that Russell's use of religion carries with it the key assumptions that have shaped modern self-understanding: religion and the secular are opposites and are at bottom, opposing conceptions of reality. For Russell, religion is supernatural and irrational meaning that evil in its religious form must be supernatural and irrational. Religion belongs to the past: therefore, religious types of evil must belong to the past. The best kind of religion is privatised type of morality: therefore, the best construal of evil is as a moral problem. These assumptions are not neutral but ground the superiority of the secular and secularism as a doctrine whose function is to watch over religion in case it develops its predisposition towards violence. The irony is the concept of religion and its opposition to the secular is historically made through the military and culture wars that engulfed Europe in the aftermath of the Reformation. What is important is that Russell never questions or challenges the opposition between religion and the secular and therefore religious and secular conceptualisations of evil are given sense of immutable finality and not the result of historically contingent process which might help to explain why evil is a 'highly contested word'[26] or why 'the word 'evil' is ambiguous.'[27] Failure to appreciate the genealogy of the categories of religion or the secular threatens to deepen the gulf in understanding that Russell believes that his secular concept of evil can overcome.

Why do we need a Secular Concept of Evil?

In the previous section we looked at one contemporary attempt to articulate a secular moral concept of evil. The secular concept of evil strengthens the disenchantment of evil; one example of this was how the question over incomprehensibility of evil that conventionally

[26] Luke Russell, *Evil*: *Investigation* 1
[27] Ibid 10

united secular and religious thinkers has been turned object of conceptual analysis. At the same time, we noted that a secular concept of evil is built on certain assumptions about religion and the secular. Furthermore, the Christian genealogy of these concepts also inflect the idea morality behind evil. To that extent, a straightforward secular concept is mired in certain tensions. We shall say little more on this in the final section.

Now we want to turn to where the imperative for a secular concept of evil comes from. In other words, why do we need a secular concept of evil? I suspect some of the justifications were provided by Russell who seemed to believe that it was a public duty that atheists and theists have a common understanding of evil. Yet we don't usually make a similar demand of other intellectual concepts. No one asserts that we need a secular concept of justice or equality, these are assumed to be secular concepts. Furthermore, when Arendt surveyed the horrific consequences of totalitarianism and noted that the problem of evil will be the definitive problem of the post-war context, there was no mention over a burning need for a secular concept of evil.

Ostensibly, this need for a secular concept has something to do with the intuitive identification of religion and evil that has been preserved, although not timelessly, within the historical memory of Europe. When we say that immigrants are being demonised, we are ineluctably drawn into a framework that supposedly belongs to religion. Furthermore, it may also have to do with the sense in which religion is never impartial. That is, believers' moral judgement will be compromised by its religious commitments and are therefore alienating for believers from a different faith or those who do not believe. On the hand, the secular is understood, correctly or incorrectly as a democratic concept, and as such a secular concept of evil is not wedded to immutable theological commitments. Therefore, it cannot be judged as partial in its construction of evil but essentially open to believers and non-believers alike.

However, we showed in the previous section that the idea that a secular concept of evil cannot be entirely free of certain assumptions of what religion is, and is also mired in certain problems derived from its Christian genealogy. Furthermore, there is also the connection to a Christian genealogy of religion and the secular, and these naturally shape how we thinks about evil. In the last section we want to argue how even the supposedly secular conceptual analysis draws upon religion to make sense of evil as a secular concept. However, here we are interested in asserting that the secular concept of evil is really about the secular endeavouring to assert its own universality. In other words, the need for a secular concept of evil is related to a fear amongst secularists provoked by the return of religion and what this means for the ideology of secularism and the narrative of secularisation that supports the ideology of secularism. The imperative for a secular concept of evil is not entirely a disinterested intellectual exercise that involves secularists reflecting and construing an intelligible concept of evil. There is a worry or anxiety that whilst religion possesses a robust understanding of evil, by contrast, a secular concept of evil is compromised by needing to satisfy so many notions of the good without appearing to align with anyone in particular. This point seems to be implied in Russell's observation that his interest in evil is motivated as a response to the hostility between religion and secularism. He contends that one reason for the divisiveness of evil is that it 'could be described as a dispute between religious fundamentalists, who think they possess moral certainty, and atheists, who are tolerant and humble in the face of inter-cultural disagreement.'[28] The 'humble' atheist has been too honest and has therefore allowed the discourse of evil to remain within a religious sphere. This has contributed to a situation that is politically dangerous but also psychologically unhealthy given secularism cannot name something evil without calling its neutrality into question.

[28] Ibid

We might therefore be helped by interpreting the need for a secular concept of evil as the logical result of a deeper 'crises' within the secular. It is of course, quite fashionable to assert a crisis in political or intellectual circles. It bequeaths a sense of importance or a seriousness to one's subject matter. Yet it is not unreasonable to claim that two of the derivative concepts of the secular have been seriously questioned in recent years. Firstly, political secularism is facing questions of Eurocentrism and even intolerance which threatens its legitimacy as a universal political project.[29] And secondly, the secularisation narrative that defines the self-understanding of Europe as a space that has overcome or emancipated itself from historical religion has also been criticised relentlessly over the last few decades. We cannot hope to do justice to this enormous debate here, but we might note a few outstanding features that allow us to think of the broader context in which the imperative for a secular concept of evil enters into and is brought together by September 11.

For most of the twentieth century, secularism has been the default setting for how modern and post-colonial states implement laws and organise their societies. Most societies are not homogenous and therefore made up of different degrees of religious and cultural plurality. In practical terms, secularism whether in the shape of political democracy or indeed authoritarianism has functioned to preserve this plurality without seemingly preferring one religious belief system over another. Therefore, until recently it could be assumed quite reasonably that 'Secularism, on the other hand, appeared to have no ideological significance of its own, other than the taken-for-granted absence or obsolescence of religion.'[30] In recent years, it's historically unblemished persona of having saved Europe from perpetual sectarian violence has taken a bruising and looks increasingly dishevelled under the weight of contemporary criticism. According to William Connolly secularism has come under increasing scrutiny from

[29] See José Casanova, 'Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective, Vol 8, *Hedgehog Review*, 2006

[30] Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen 'Introduction' In *Rethinking Secularism*, 3

both religionists and secularists who view privatising metaphysics and religion from the political has had 'the secondary effect of consolidating flat conceptions of theory, ethics and public life.'[31] The absence of any greater meaning to life beyond the acquisition of greater consumer goods and public services has created a space for oppositional forces towards secularism to appear.

The most visible challenge towards secularism has been the return of religious actors in a global context demanding not only participation in the political process but more fundamentally their religious beliefs be enacted as laws implemented by the state. The most cited example is the growth of Islamist politics across the middle east. Yet, these movements ought to be seen as part of a broader phenomenon that includes evangelical Christianity, Hindu majoritarianism, Zionism and Sikh nationalism. There are of course differences between the Islamic revival in North Africa or South Asia compared to evangelical Christianity in America or sub-Sahara Africa. However, the common feature to the religious resurgence in global politics is an active role in shaping state and society according to principles of faith. This questions the basic assumption of secularism that religion and state have to remain institutionally separate to achieve modernity, democracy and capitalism.

The return of religion has therefore had a knock-on effect upon the narrative of secularisation which predicts the inevitable decline of religion, as something that is the inevitable result of scientific knowledge, industrialisation and moral freedom. This narrative of secularisation is also essential to the disenchantment thesis that the spiritual has been exorcised permanently from the material world and the natural role of religion is to remain in a privatised sphere of life. Paradigmatic of the 're-enchantment' of modernity is the recantation of Peter Berger. Once the foremost proponent of secularisation theory, Berger famously predicted in 1968 that by 'the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in

[31] William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1999) 19

small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture.'[32] With the reappearance of religious movements as active forces in Western and non-Western societies from the 1980's, Berger was forced to admit that the 'world today' is 'as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more than ever.'[33] Although secularisation has been useful in describing the transformation of Europe's religious past, there are doubts whether it can explain its present or predict its future.

The rise of militant religion followed by an uncompromising atheism in many western societies raises questions over the capability of secularism to fill the void left by religion. The search or the imperative that we find in a secular concept of evil that can satisfy 'purely' secular thinkers can partly be attributed to this sense of void created by the removal or the redaction of religion. In the minds of most secularists, secularism is the only political choice and essential intellectual identity by virtue of its commitment to scientific reason and the political equality expressed through a universal public reason. Therefore, a secular concept of evil is the natural and inevitable result of the secular commitment to freedom and equality. Even if a secularist substitutes evil with harm or replaces evil with extreme wrongdoing, they are not encumbered by religious prejudices and as such weighed down by seeing humanity determined by sin or the superstitious belief in evil spirits as possessing serial killers. All of which compromise a commitment to human freedom and equality that the secular valorises and identifies as essential to a concept of evil that is universal.

However, with this in mind, a secular concept of evil must also to be understood as supporting its own doctrine that is represented by political secularism or secularisms. A secular concept of evil is never completely partial, it has to privilege its historical and intellectual

[32] Rodney Stark, Secularization R.I.P' *Sociology of Religion*, 60, No. 3 (1999) 252

[33] Peter Berger, 'Introduction' in *The Desecularisation of the World*: *Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans/Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999) 2

identity that derives from naturalism and individual agency. Understood like this, is a secular concept of evil supporting the political doctrine of secularism radically different to a religious concept of evil supporting one Christian theological doctrine? Undoubtedly there are some differences of content between the secular concept of evil from a religious concept of evil. But as Nietzsche and Anscombe have shown, there is also a continuity of content. Indeed, the form this argument takes is similar and looks all very confessional. This begs the question over the extent disenchantment or secularisation and whether through secularisation some trace of the religious remains.

Evil and 'Re-enchantment'

In this concluding section we point out that even a rigorous conceptualisation of evil is drawn into relying on some understanding of religion to make evil intelligible. An important reason for this is the secularisation narrative which has been criticised and reinterpreted in recent years for its religious genealogy.[34] One side of this re-interpretation is the continuing significance and survival of Christian concepts within the secularisation narrative. In the chapter on the reformation of evil we noted the role of reformers contribution to the privatisation of belief and the disenchantment of magical beliefs (that left their own beliefs vulnerable to a similar critique). My point is that secularisation is misunderstood if we interpret it as entirely in opposition to Christianity.

This is not to deny disenchantment or the importance of instrumental rationality or self-assertion. But to recognise that even secular values that are seemingly neutral can be inflected by some kind of relationship to religion. We saw this in the previous chapter and how the 'nation' or 'freedom' attain a value that is above and beyond history and even rational intelligibility. Furthermore, in this chapter, we pointed out the significance of Christianity

[34] See John Gray, *Black Mass* : *Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* 1st American ed. (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux 2007)

behind the idea of morality and how secular morality makes use of ideas that have been stamped with Christian meaning. The core of the contemporary secular account of evil relies on explaining how evil can be distinguished from wrongdoing or a general sense of badness without falling into religion which therefore question its impartiality. How this distinction has been theorised by secular theorists of evil is problematic to the extent that some connection to religion is relied on to give intelligibility to evil. Therefore, the failure to affirm a robust distinction between evil and wrongdoing has pushed some theorist to argue that the only logical thing to do is abandon the concept of evil entirely.

The argument of continuity between religious and secular concepts I am tracing owes a considerable debt to Carl Schmitt and his famous observation that 'All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.'[35] It is reasonable to assume that according to Schmitt secularism is a replacement for religion. Although he does not say this explicitly, in the famous quote cited above he goes on to make the analogy between how 'omnipotent god became the omnipotent lawgiver' and the how the 'exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.'[36] Schmitt's argument has gone on to influence theorists of secularisations who challenge the identification of secularisation with and through disenchantment.

In *Meaning in History*, Karl Löwith argued how modern philosophical history and its conviction that history was progressive and linear was derived from a belief in human existence as moving towards salvation.

> Similarly, and more generally, the Christian scheme of history and the particular scheme of Joachim created an intellectual climate and a perspective in which alone certain philosophies of history became possible which are impossible within the framework of classical thinking. There would be no American, no French, and no Russian revolutions and constitutions without the idea of progress and no idea of secular progress toward fulfilment without the original faith in a Kingdom of God,

[35] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*: *Four Chapters on The Concept Of Sovereignty*, trans George Schwab (Chicago, Chicago University Press 2005) 36
[36] Ibid

> though one can hardly say that the teaching of Jesus is manifest in the manifestoes of these political movements.[37]

The fundamental continuity that Schmitt and Löwith point out between theological concepts and their secular successors makes a further compelling case to examine how much the secular case for evil rests on some reference to religion. We noted in the analysis of Russell's secular moral concept of evil that it was mired in tensions thanks to its assumptions of what religion was and how this differentiated it from the secular. Are there more examples where the reliance on religious conceptualisations for the secular intelligibility of evil have been overlooked? In this regard the most contentious element in the debate amongst contemporary analysts of evil and what sees them oscillating between secular intelligibility and secular bafflement is the problem of what actually differentiates evil from other moral concepts, once the religious or metaphysical background has been removed.

Although many people will name genocide, serial killing or rape as evil and therefore distinguishable from other wrongdoing like cheating in an exam. There is something extra to evil that separates the nature of such an act. According to Garrard the 'implication is that there is a qualitative, and not merely quantitative, difference between evil acts and other wrongful ones; evil acts are not just very bad or wrongful acts, but rather ones possessing some specially horrific quality.'[38] What exactly is this 'magical' extra quality, and therefore differentiating evil from bad, could also be understood as pointing out a sense of the unintelligible at the very heart of the secular concept of evil. One indicator of the difficulty of distinguishing evil from wrongdoing is to consider the number of different theories that are speculating over this problem. Keke's focus is on life-wrecking harms that cause suffering that is impossible to morally or physically recover from.[39] Card identifies evil as a moral concept that produces

[37] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*: *The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, Chicago University Press 1949) 219
[38] Garrard, Evil as an Explanatory Concept 321
[39] John Kekes, *The Roots of Evil* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press 2005) pp 1-2

foreseeable harms rooted in some understanding of moral culpability.[40] Calder's theory of evil brings together a significant harm with and inexcusable intention to bring out harm for an inexcusable goal.[41] Formosa's combination theory of evil brings together: a perpetrator, an morally unjustifiable component and victim component. McGinn conception is that evil tied to a sadistic personality that wilfully inflicts suffering and derives pleasure from inflicting pain on a victim.[42] In Garrard's synthetic account; what motivates an evil action is when the reason for not committing a wrongful action are silenced altogether.[43]

The plurality of theories is not enough by themselves to signify that there is something religious or metaphysical behind secular explanations of evil. Nevertheless, it is an example that an exclusively secular concept faces problems of intelligibility and may not be able to untangle the contradictions that religious thinkers have raised when confronting evil. The magical quality needed to identify evil from wrong or bad becomes serious a problem that is hardly contained through secular analysis alone. An important example in this regard is the theory of evil presented by Garrard that attempts to give us a robust means to distinguish evil and wrongdoing.

Garrard's theory of evil action rests on a notion of silencing taken from the philosopher John McDowell. According to McDowell, the virtuous agent (in contrast to the contingent agent) is one who silences temptation rather than overcome them. The reason giving force of some actions therefore lose their force in the virtuous agent because they are silenced. For Garrard, 'evil action is one in which the agent is entirely impervious – blind deaf – to the presence of significant reasons against his acting.'[44] It is not simply that the perpetrators are impervious to reasons it is that they are impervious to reasons that do not have any real reason

[40] Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm a Theory of Evil* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002) Introduction
[41] Todd Calder, 'Is Evil Just Very Wrong?' *Philosophical Studies* Vol 163, No. 1 (2013) 188
[42] Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford, Clarendon 1999) pp 64-6
[43] Eve Garrard, The Nature of Evil, *Philosophical Explorations,* No. 1 (1998) pp 53-4
[44] Eve Garrard, Evil as a Explanatory' 330

giving force at all. To illustrate her point Garrard gives the example of protecting my child from a painful lingering death for a modest amount of money. This is no reason at all when saving your child's life is weighed against a few pennies. Garrard is convinced that her use of silencing bequeaths an explanatory value on evil and distinguishes it from wrongdoing because we could use it to point out that such and such a person performed such an action because he was (inexplicably) deaf and blind to the power of reason giving.

To this I would add that evil as action that eludes reason and can be described as unconceptualizable by reason giving reintroduces a kind of incomprehensibility to evil. Although Garrard would argue that the reference point for evil is worldly because it is limited by language and intelligible philosophical categories and as such it remains a secular theory of evil. However, with evil as something impervious to reason, Garrard seems to be intent on bringing up the ghost of Augustine. Illustrated by Augustine's famous anecdote of the pears and his failure to give reason on why he robbed the farmers orchard. There is a common sensibility between Garrard and Augustine that evil is ultimately something futile and as such unconceptualisable by reasons or reason giving alone. We are of course not judging Garrard's theory of evil as incorrect but pointing out that as a secular explanation of evil it continues to be held back or cannot entirely free itself from questions over the intelligibility of evil raised by Christianity.

In principle, a secular concept of evil needs to erase all traces of the metaphysical not simply the obvious ones such as the 'satanic' or 'sinfulness.' And this includes the conviction that evil does in fact have this qualitative otherness that differentiates it from similar moral concepts. The fact that the intelligibility of evil cannot be entirely grasped through a purely analytical and explanatory framework has pushed some theorists interrogating the secular concept of evil as calling for its removal altogether. Phillip Cole believes the idea of evil 'obstructs our understanding, blocks our way, brings us to a halt. 'Evil' is a black-hole concept which gives

the illusion of explanation, when it actually represents is the failure to understand.'[45] For Cole evil is like a Greek tragedy and plays a purely symbolic meaning in explaining human affairs. Whether Cole's interesting suggestion is another stage in the disenchantment of evil or the completion of the secular discourse through the elimination of evil is unclear? I am personally sceptical of the virtue of elimination altogether. Ostensibly there are concerns over the role evil plays in demonising migrants or excluding minorities. Significantly, we are still going to have to make sense of horrific unintelligible actions. Denoting them as extremely bad or very wrong may not fill the void of evil.

Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at the contemporary debate on evil that has emerged since the turn of the millennium. Although it is fair to say the conceptual analysis of evil is something that also precedes the terror attacks. It is the terror attacks which has accelerated something that was disapproved or essentially marginalised from mainstream academic discourse. I believe the resurgence of religion and the subsequent war on terror has created a fertile environment for interest in a problem that is traditionally identified as religious and finds its most fertile home in theology or philosophy of religion departments. We noted that secularism and liberalism have an anxiety and this anxiety is brought by a sense in which secular liberalism is dependent on a morality that is perceived as either too weak compared to religion or too compromised to make intelligible the problem of human violence and the resulting suffering. One solution to this has been to assert a secular concept of evil that can comprehend why evil occurs but can also tackle more fundamental questions to do with the explanatory power of evil that is independent and distinguishable from similar moral concepts.

There are however problems for a secular concept of evil. Primarily how much secularisation is possible when the concept of the secular and the narrative of secularisation are

[45] Phillip Cole, *The Myth of Evil* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2006) 236

draw from a Christian genealogy. Additionally, 'religion' as a category only became an object for scientific analysis during the enlightenment. This has shaped what religion is and therefore why evil is considered a religious concept. The ultimate trajectory of the identification of religion and evil may be seen in Cole's decision to abandon evil altogether and turn evil into a purely neuro-biological problem that afflicts some humanity.[46] Perhaps neuroscience and biological determinism is the new terrain of original sin. One difficulty with Cole's analysis is that his stringent naturalism that treats evil as a natural reaction rooted in natural psychology seems to amount to another mythology.

My interest as was pointed out in the introduction is less determined by the need to come up with a perfect concept of evil or indeed solve the problem of evil. The aim of this thesis has been to highlight the discursive nature of evil and how this discourse within secularity draws on religion for its intelligibility and unintelligibility. A religious concept of evil is one that must free itself from in order to assert a purely secular concept of evil. But the secular constructs the religious as supernatural and irrational and therefore always has to make reference to this construction of religion to give evil some secular intelligibility or say why it is entirely unintelligible. My scepticism towards a purely secular concept of evil derives from the entangled relationship with religious and this creates a myriad of difficulties from the nature of violence or the explaining evil through reasons and motives alone. Furthermore, a secular concept of evil promotes the ideology of secularism, and this compromises some absolute claim to impartiality. It is tempting to conclude that emancipating from religion, as best it can, a secular concept of evil excludes other ways of making sense of evil, suffering or experiencing pain. The desire to fix evil into a secular discourse comes with problematic baggage.

The underlying result in the conceptualisation of evil is that we seem to be restricted to making a choice between a form of 'exclusive humanism' understood here as secular

[46] Ibid pp 12-20

naturalism (exemplified by Russell's more accommodative naturalism or Cole's austere naturalism) an exclusively religious concept of evil. This is what Taylor described as cross-pressure, that is we either have to choose some form religion or the secular to make sense of our lives. Taylor, however, points out thinkers and European intellectual, artistic and political movements that preserved some link and ideal of transcendence even within a purely secular space.

In the final part of this thesis, I want to present Kant and Arendt as two such intellectuals, who whilst also secularising were aware of the need to find greater meaning or depth within the secular. A sense of human flourishing did not have to entail that we remove every trace of religion from human life. At the same time, both are responsible for two of the most commented and memorable conceptualisations of evil in the secular age. I want to present these two historical discourses of evil that do not imagine evil as essentially a choice between a secular and religious. Although there is a certain amount of criticism towards religious conceptualisation of evil from both. Their works are as much informed in opposition to secular ideologies like naturalism, nihilism, or totalitarianism. In the rest of this thesis, we shall present Kant and Arendt as intellectuals wrestling with both the limits of secular modes of thinking and also mindful of the deeper impact this has on religion.

Part Three: An Eye to God

6. Radical Evil: Between Freedom and Sinfulness

In the final part of this thesis, we want to make use of Taylor's idea of 'cross-pressures' in secular modernity, in order to make another aspect of the discourse of evil intelligible. What is meant by cross-pressures or the feeling of being cross-pressured is the tension produced between the encounter of religious beliefs on the one hand, and 'exclusive humanism' on the other. Taylor believes the tension has created space for persons who seek 'middle positions, which have drawn from both sides.'[1] This tension creates a search for some greater depth to life that draws upon religion and the secular ideas to articulate a sense of fullness. It can be expressed in the form of a spiritual faith, as in Kant, or the attempt to ground the human condition in some higher conception of political freedom, as in Arendt. This sense of cross-pressure can be used to make sense of the discourses of evil that do not fit the categories of religion or the secular but nevertheless draw on both to give evil a sense of intelligibility that is not found within an exclusively religious or secular understanding. It therefore allows us to view some kind of middle position in the intelligibility of evil, one that doesn't seek elimination of the idea or content of evil (as with the secular conceptualisations that we examined in the previous chapter) but mindful of the limitations bequeathed by religious conceptualisations of evil.

For the remainder of this thesis, I want to explore Kant's concept of 'radical' evil and Arendt's concept of the 'banality' of evil, as paradigmatic of this sense of being cross-pressured and both Kant and Arendt endeavouring to give some intelligibility to evil within these cross-pressures. Both Kant and Arendt have contributed to perhaps the most memorable and commented on formulations of evil within secular modernity. And given, the secularising direction of their moral and political philosophies (or 'theory' in the case of Arendt) we might reasonably expect a similar trajectory for their conceptualisations of evil. However, whilst it is

[1] Taylor, *A Secular Age* 595

true that neither re-produce exact theological or religious conceptualisations of evil, it is also fair to say that both conceptualisations of evil are directed more critically towards secular rationality and reason than anything in the contemporary discourse of evil. In Kant, this developed into his criticisms of scientific naturalism and his aim to find a middle path between faith and knowledge. Arendt's understanding is formed against the secular ideologies of racism, antisemitism, imperialism that are symbolised by modern totalitarianism. Their attempts to make evil intelligible are distinguishable from contemporary conceptualisations of evil in that they are not inflected by an overt opposition towards religion, and believing religion is the obstacle to comprehending evil. Kant challenges the idea of Original Sin as much as naturalism; his philosophy affirms moral autonomy to find a middle position that asserts that human beings are morally rational but also flawed creatures. Arendt is not bound to Kant's religious idealism but her comprehension of evil as 'radical' or 'banality' borrows extensively from Augustine's sense of evil as something futile. Furthermore, her criticisms of the Jerusalem court as 'demonising' Eichmann is directed as much at secular ideologies as it is the theological tradition of understanding evil. Therefore, tensions within their conceptualisations of evil that can be dismissed as contradictory or unintelligible maybe understood as a natural result of being cross-pressured within secular modernity.

Let us begin with Kant, whose intellectual reputation is bound up with the success of the new scientific worldview that comes to prominence with the Enlightenment. This new understanding is broadly divided into an empirical-mechanistic one practised by Hobbes and Newton, and a rational-conceptual one theorised by Descartes and Leibniz. Furthermore, Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy marks a fundamental step in the birth of the modern subject essential to the philosophy of secularism. Kant's so-called 'Copernican revolution'[2] turned the human subject into *the* agent and instrument for constructing both rational and

[2] Frank Thilly, "Kant's Copernican Revolution" *The Monist* Vol.35, No. 2 (1925) pp 329–345

empirical categories. Furthermore, in presenting human beings as ends born with freedom and inherent dignity, Kant was able to divest limits placed on human knowledge and action by Christian theology and in particular the sense in which human nature was irreparably damaged by the 'fall.'

What complicates Kant's reputation as the champion for modern secularism is his work *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (*Religion*) and even subsequent religiously themed works.[3] This work covers: God, religion, Christ, morality, evil, sinfulness, guilt, free will, grace, hermeneutics, political religion to mention the nominally most important religious conceptualisations. Not the themes one would ascribe to a secular thinker or opponent of religion. This has led Charles Firestone to suggest 'these writings present the traditional interpretation with deep problems in trying to explain his interest in God and the significant way he employs theological concepts.'[4] Perhaps, nothing exemplifies this more starkly than Kant's essay on radical evil (1794). *The rationale for radical evil is the central paradox of individuals who know the moral law but consciously choose to disobey the moral law.* In other words, why do decent, ordinary, morally upstanding people do horrific things? In this regard, this basic problematic also runs through Arendt who believed Eichmann was distinguished by his normality. What is significant about radical evil is Kant makes two philosophical claims that seem to contradict the basic character of his moral philosophy. These claims are: (i) that human beings have essentially an evil disposition (*Gesinuung*) at the base of their characters and (ii) that human beings have a propensity (*Hang*) to evil that is universal. Both *Gesinuung* and *Hang* throw doubt over how far human beings can through their own moral freedom transform their (innately) corrupt personalities. Surely, if human beings are innately corrupt

[3] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*, edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1998)
[4] Chris Firestone, "Making Sense Out of Tradition: Theology and Conflict in Kant's Philosophy of Religion" in Firestone, Chris L., and Stephen. Palmquist. *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press 2006) 141

then they cannot become morally culpable for evil actions? Furthermore, these actions flow from corrupt traits that exist in a ground that is neither of their choosing and cannot be transformed by their own power? These tensions have led Richard Bernstein to conclude that Kant is at 'war with himself' because 'he never wants to compromise the basic claim of his moral philosophy: that human beings as finite rational agents are free, which means that they are solely and completely responsible for their moral choices and for the maxims they adopt.'[5]

Bernstein's claims have also led to an equal amount of exasperation over how to assess the contribution of radical evil to the modern discourse of evil. Goethe famously wrote that 'Kant required a long lifetime to purify his philosophical mantle of many impurities and prejudices. And now he has wantonly tainted it with the shameful stain of radical evil, in order that Christians too might be attracted to kiss its hem.'[6] Similarly, Michalson believed the tensions found in Kant's moral claims and his theoretical claims are 'symptomatic of the fact that Kant has not totally thrown off the habits of mind produced by a Christian culture.'[7] However, several recent works have tried to preserve the secular character of Kant's concept of radical evil. Goldberg writes that 'Kant is one of the first philosophers to offer a decidedly secular theory of evil.'[8] Robert Louden has also claimed that 'his theory of radical evil is the first distinctively modern account of evil.'[9]

In this chapter, I will argue that despite Kant undoubtedly sailing close to both religious orthodoxy and to scientific naturalism, we ought to understand that his overall intention was to find a third way through radical evil. More specifically, although Kant is operating within an intellectual *millieu* that is increasingly dominated by scientific naturalism he wants to preserve

[5] Bernstein, *Radical Evil*, 33
[6] Evgenia Cherkosova, 'On the Boundary of Intelligibility: Kant's Conception of Radical Evil and the Limits of Ethical Discourse', *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol 58, No. 3 (Mar 2005) 571
[7] Gordon Michalson, *Fallen Freedom: Kant on Radical evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1990) 9
[8] Zachary J Goldberg, "Can Kant's Theory of Radical Evil Be Saved?" *Kantian Review* Vol 22, No. 3 (2017) 395
[9] Robert Louden, Evil Everywhere: The Ordinariness of Kantian Radical Evil Sharon Anderson-Gold, and Pablo Muchnik, (eds), *Kant's Anatomy of Evil* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2010) 94

the significance of religion and Christianity to any conceptualisation of evil by virtue of showing up some of the limits of human agency. That is, despite his promotion of moral freedom as essential to human beings assuming moral responsibility, the concept of *Gesinunng* and *Hang* respectively, are meant as reminders of the dangers of unrestrained freedom. At the same time, he rejects a wholly natural (causal) account of human agency and wants to root evil in moral freedom. Kant is not a theologian, but this ought not prevent us from seeing that his philosophical arguments draw limits around human freedom and therefore are not incommensurable with the theological endeavour. Although Kant may have contributed to the formation of modern secularism, the devaluation of orthodox religion was not necessarily his intention. In other words, there is a real interdependence between religion and the secularism of his theoretical-practical project. This creates tension within his work, but it also helps us to rethink the contribution of Kant's concept of radical evil.

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the evolution of radical evil in relation to his broader philosophy. In section (i) we shall briefly mention the 'cross-pressured' context that radical evil comes into; (ii) from here we shall note the evolution of Kant's ideas of evil prior to his essay on radical evil; (iii) an exposition of the concept of radical evil and its central concepts of the will and moral maxims (iv) examines the controversy around the *Gesinuung* (disposition) and Kant's notion of *Hang* (propensity) and finally (v) a brief conclusion.

Cross-Pressures: Between Naturalism and Religious Orthodoxy

Kant's philosophical work is best contextualised as facing the growing tide of secular naturalism pushing against traditional metaphysical concepts. These concepts are respected by Kant, but he recognises they are incapable of meeting the exacting standards of certitude demanded by empiricism or rationalism respectively. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood point out in their introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the

> *Critiques* main intention is to find a middle way between traditional metaphysics, especially its attempts to bolster a theistic view of the world with a priori rational arguments, and a scepticism that would undercut the claims of modern natural science along with those of traditional metaphysics.[10]

Although his intellectual milieu was dominated by the rationalism of Leibniz and the increasing prominence of British empiricism, through the work of Locke and Hume, what is important to note is that his theoretical philosophy looks to balance the assertions of empiricism and rationalism whilst preserving what he feasibly can of religious metaphysics by establishing doctrinal beliefs based on moral precepts. This led Kant to famously assert in the preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that 'I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.'[11] Both the dogmatism of religious orthodoxy and the anti-religious assertions of secular naturalism were to be checked by Kant in a strategy that would simultaneously undermine scepticism about empirical knowledge and resist claims to legitimise religious faith.

Perhaps the most important field for thinking in this regard, concerns the possibility of human freedom. This was particularly significant given the context that saw the growing success and respectability assigned to natural causality. The scientific worldview threatened to reduce human motivations to an unvarying common denominator i.e., passion, desire or sympathy. On the other hand, orthodox religion was also compromised by metaphysical causality, through the need to satisfy an omnipotent God that burdened human beings with Original Sin and thus condemning them to repeating mistakes generationally. For Kant, power was invested in human action, will, intention and motivation, so that 'human understanding' is 'the true lawgiver of nature' whilst 'nature is to be regarded as essentially an object of human sensation and thinking.'[12] What Kant is pointing out is that scientific and religious ideas are intelligible because they involve the participation of our intellect in their formation. That is,

[10] Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, 'Introduction' in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed and trans Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1998) 20
[11] Immanuel Kant, *Critique*, 117
[12] Guyer and Wood, *Critique*, 21

human beings are not passive receivers under the control of natural mechanisms that determine actions, any more than being under the whims of a sovereign God. But this authority is internalised, so that we play a creative role in the categorisation of nature, as well as the construction of religious beliefs and practices by discerning what they mean to society and how they ought to be practised by the intellectual culture.

What follows from the notion of a radically self-determining agent invested with motivation and intention to 'make' the world is a sense in which the discourse of evil also has to be reframed. As a result, the discourse of evil is removed from being either exhausted by considerations of materialistic causality or natural motivations by handing over decisions in this area to ecclesiastical authorities. Moreover, the epistemological challenge presented by evil is that it is not enough for us to passively accept scientific causality or religious revelation as explanations for evil. Instead, it is up to human beings to discern their own role in defining evil and interrogating their contribution to this discourse.

The Good Will

Kant's journey to radical evil goes through some subtle intellectual evolutions. The basic outline is found in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Groundwork*). Kant's moral ontology divides human beings into a sensual world of desires and an intelligible world made up of rational morality. Whilst the animal nature is obedient to its sensuous incentives, the intelligible self, struggles to overcome these incentives and obey the duties that arise from the moral law. The moral law appears in various guises in the *Groundwork*, but is most intelligible through Kant's formulation: 'So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as means.'[13] Despite the moral law within, the duality in human nature manifests itself in the conflict between '*is'*

[13] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* ed and trans Mary J. Gregor, and Jens Timmermann, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 41

and '*ought'* that is the basic cause for human immorality. Kant expresses it as 'The moral ought is thus one's own necessary willing as a member of an intelligible world, and he thinks of it as an ought only in so far as he considers himself at the same time as a member of the world of sense.'[14] In other words, my natural self, tugs away at my intelligible self, and therefore diverts it away from the duties I *ought* to be doing in favour of what my sensual nature *is* desiring.

However, the challenge of morality is that moral actions are ideally performed by dint of autonomous obedience to one's rational incentives. That is, '*the property the will has of being a law to itself.*'[15] It follows that responsibilities and obligations are duties I impose or legislate upon myself from the standpoint that I and others are born with an inherent power to reason and to reason morally. To be moral in a Kantian sense means responsibilities are not something that should be taught to us by the state or the church. But as self-governing individuals, we control our behaviours by acting according to the moral law. Naturally, people are rarely this procedural in their thinking or actions, and human catastrophes remind us that subjective inclinations often triumph over reasoned moral obligations. Kant was enough of a moral realist to anticipate this by dividing moral being into personhood (who self-legislates) and humanity (still motivated by inclinations).[16] There was a hope that these natural propensities could be domesticated if we learn to act and see others as moral beings born with inherent dignity and with intrinsic ends that obligated respect.

Practically, the consequences of rational agency were monumental for eighteenth-century Europe. As moral evils were seen as actions created temporally and causatively related to the chosen intentions of a responsible agent, this implied that moral reasons could even be demanded from those in authority, which in due course could then be critiqued and thrown out for not conforming to the criteria of universal moral imperatives. Politically and socially,

[14] Ibid 64
[15] Ibid 51
[16] Allen Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2007) 172

rational agency or autonomy challenged the power of monarchs and the churches to dictate what kinds of social and political rules were acceptable, and importantly what kinds of obligations arose from those rules. What frightened religious orthodoxy particularly about autonomy, was that if indeed it was a 'representation of an objective principle'[17] it also meant that God (or the church) held obligations which they had to act from. That is, if autonomy was a universal principle, it also meant that God had to reciprocate to reward those actions of believers that conformed to universal imperatives of the good and punish moral evils. God falling short of fulfilling obligations failed to be a respected and responsible God. For the Church, the idea of individuals self-imposing responsibility for good and evil also meant bargaining with God, provoking a chain of thoughts too awful to contemplate.

The basic character of morality in the *Groundwork* is identified with the 'good will.' This is made clear in the opening section.

> A good will is good not because of what it effects, or accomplishes, not because of its fitness to attain some intended end, but good just by its willing, i.e., in itself; and, considered by itself, it is to be esteemed beyond compare much higher than anything that could ever be brought about by it in favour of some inclination, and indeed, if you will, the sum of all inclinations.[18]

One this view, the good man is one who possess a good will; one that wills autonomously by turning categorical imperatives into the ground for moral action. Only those actions that are motivated out of a duty to obey the moral law can constitute the *good will*. Duty is therefore central to Kant's moral lexicon, but he reformulates duty away from the traditional coercive paternalism into something that is inscribed with moral growth and potential. Kant repeats on several occasions the motive for duty 'is the necessity of an action from respect for the law'[19] meaning the object of the maxim of duty is independent of any empirical inclination (passions/prejudices/religious traditions for instance) and therefore we always act from duty.

[17] Kant, *Groundwork* 27
[18] Kant, *Groundwork* 10
[19] Ibid 51

What can get missed from this technical formulation of duty is that moral intuitions pre-exist duty as '*inner or self-constraint*.'[20] Duties are built from a respect we share by seeing others as bearers of moral ends. Respect though is also embedded with deep moral feelings inscribed within our natures and which motivate our relations to others. What this means is that duties cannot be imposed upon us and others without consent, duties have to be self-imposed.

This brief synopsis of Kant's moral philosophy sets the background to radical evil. Firstly, it is rooted in a morality of autonomous choice and secondly it enshrines the centrality of motive or the good will as the basis for this morality. However, Kant's identification of the good will as the free (autonomous) will also points to a deeper problem with the philosophy of the *Groundwork*. Kant defined the will as the 'capacity to choose only that which reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary, i.e. good.'[21] Accordingly this definition identified moral action with practical reason meaning that real freedom was carried out in obedience to maxims universalised into the moral law. The difficulty of identifying freedom with obeying moral reason was it sacrificed the unpredictability of freedom for one that seemed quite determinist. This version of freedom didn't give humanity real freedom to choose between good and evil. Reinhold, for example a staunch supporter of a Kantian conception, believed moral freedom ought to be seen as the capability for self-determination either in accordance with or contrary to the dictates of the law.[22] However, if the good will was always obedient to practical reason, then a positive sense of freedom was lacking since one could never freely choose to disobey the moral law. According to, John Silber, Kant fails to fully appreciate the comprehensive nature of freedom because he 'did not leave place for the introduction of desires into the will nor for the capacity of the will to act in opposition to the

[20] Allen Wood, *Kantian Ethics* 160
[21] Kant, *Groundwork* 27
[22] Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990) 133

law when he defined the will as practical reason.'[23] Kant had stated in the *Groundwork* that 'Empirical principles are not fit to be the foundation of moral laws at all.'[24] Kant constructed a beautiful moral system but one that gave empirical humanity very little room to move around and become responsible on their own terms.

Therefore, what the *Groundwork* seems to be telling us is that we are free in a practical sense, so long as we obey obligations of moral reason. In this regard, it draws comparison to Augustine's understanding of a good will that is obedient to rational nature and therefore God. Although, the ideal of autonomy gives the philosophy of the *Groundwork* a secularising element, the overriding idea of a good will that is only obedient to moral reason seems to be derived from Augustine's defective will. For his supporters and admirers, who saw in Kant a representative of the 'progressive' enlightenment, he failed to acknowledge an unfettered notion of human freedom. In the sense 'that the irrational is a mode of the rational, that heteronomy is a mode of free willing, and that the will must be defined in terms of desire as well as in terms of practical reason.'[25] Although immoral actions like murder or torture were excluded from the moral law. It nevertheless failed to account for perpetrators who committed these acts both deliberately and with the use of their practical rational faculties.

Therefore, moral freedom thus seemed to dissolve the distinction between good and evil because the identification of the good and free will meant there was no actual choice to reject the good and will something evil. Therefore, one of the arguments, developed in the *Critique of Practical Reason* was that we had an obligation to take assume responsibility for our empirical inclinations just as those that were the results of reason. That is, we are to be seen as responsible for actions done out of respect and conformity to the moral law but also those actions done for the sake of desire or self-love. This change was premised on 'the idealization

[23]John Silber, *The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion*, in Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone,* trans Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt Hudson (Harper & Row, London 1960) lxxxii
[24] Kant, *Groundwork*, 53
[25] Silber John Silber, *The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion*, lxxxii

of the will as a faculty of spontaneity.'[26] Kant is not abandoning autonomy but deepening it, by allowing rational moral beings to choose between obeying the purities and impurities of inclination (evil) in their will. This turn binds freedom and with it all of human nature into a source for moral principles and action. Immediately we become responsible for actions done from desire, tradition as well as reason.

Kant's formulation of radical of evil was therefore written under considerable doubt and scepticism. He had evolved an understanding of the good will that looked secularising and critical of contemporary religious morality, on account of making human beings autonomous, self-legislating and morally responsible. However, on closer inspection, the freedom he afforded human beings was limited by obedience to precepts and duties, so that unfettered freedom, and the freedom to remake humanity was elusive. The detailed rules controlling human behaviour along with the general negative assessment of sensuous incentive seemed to have chained humanity, akin to how Augustine believed original sinful had created a defective will in human beings so that human beings needed the commandments of the Church to become good and free. The essential step towards radical evil is a rehabilitation of the will and therefore an expansive notion of human freedom.

Radical Evil: Moral Freedom, the Will and Moral Maxims

Let's turn to Kant's essay on radical evil, interestingly, according to Kant's biographer, the context of the work was not just as an intellectual treatise but 'primarily a political act.'[27] A plea for intellectual freedom against the growing intolerance of the Prussian authorities. Kant's essay, *'Concerning the struggle of the good with the evil principle'* had been rejected by the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in June 1792. A letter was sent to Kant on October 1, 1794, on special orders of the King, censoring Kant and threatening him to 'expect unpleasant measures

[26] Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago, Chicago University Press 1960) 199
[27] Manfred Kuehn, *Kant*: *A Biography* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2001) 371

for your continued obstinacy.'[28] The obstinacy referred to Kant's decision to ignore the 'publisher's rejection' and to go ahead and publish *Religion*, independently.

Before examining the radical evil essay, it is worth considering why Kant used the salient term 'radical' next to evil. Bernstein warns that 'Despite the striking connotations of the term "radical", Kant is not speaking about a special type of evil or evil maxim'[29] – in the most extreme types of evil. However, Kant's deliberate use of *Böse* in the phrase *radikal Böse* as opposed to the German word *Übel* which encompasses a general sense of badness or 'Ill' can be read as a desire to quell criticisms that he was conceding too much ground to secular reason. The adjective 'radical' also has a pointed purpose. 'Radical' has Latin origins and means 'roots', Kant's expression indicates his ambition to conceive the rootedness of evil as opposed to say evil as a particular quality created by social circumstances or 'conditioning' and therefore potentially eliminated through human action on those circumstances. The 'radicalness' of evil seems to suggest that there is something rooted in human beings that leads or at least tempts them to ignore the moral law within, for the sake of pursuing non-moral incentives. Kant writes that 'We call a human being evil, however, not because he performs actions that are evil (not contrary law), but because these are so constituted that they allow the inference of evil maxims in him.'[30] As a result, radical evil can also be read as implying that the location of evil is not in human action but the character of the individual. This rootedness of evil is often identified by Kant with the principle of 'self-love' or *Selbstliebe*. Given the publication of the essay is so proximate to the French revolution, we may also speculate the use of the adjective radical is a response to some of the terror of French revolutionaries. Kant therefore was also suggesting that sin, privation or a bad will failed to reflect the novel nature of violent revolution.

[28] 379
[29] Bernstein, *Radical Evil* 20
[30] Kant, *Religion* 45

From the outset then, Kant is questioning the optimistic enlightenment prophecies predicting that human rationality meant that human evil could be bypassed if the causes of action were identified. Thus, on the opening pages of the essay on radical evil, Kant chastises the 'heroic opinion' that 'the world steadfastly (though hardly noticeably) forges ahead in the opposite direction, namely from bad to better' as an 'optimistic presupposition.'[31] Kant is not a pessimist in calling forth radical evil or doubting the moral progress human beings were capable of making. Rather, his notion of radical evil tried to preserve a middle ground between the optimistic conjectures put forward by scientific naturalism and the overly pessimistic Christian legacy of guilt and depravity tied to human sinfulness. This middle-ground recognises the centrality of human freedom, and in particular the freedom to choose moral action or to reject it in favour of non-moral action. What is central is that evil is chosen.

The key innovation in *Religion* is the concept of radical evil. Kant deepens his discussion of evil in *Religion*, and in a manner that tries to overcome the simple equating of evil with a bad will implied by his critics. What Kant is trying to understand through radical evil is why a human being who 'is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it.'[32] Human beings can therefore willingly choose to harm or inflict suffering, and this represents an important departure from the moral philosophy of the *Groundwork* and therefore looks to make up for this oversight in his earlier moral philosophy. Kant binds evil and freedom together, not because human beings are sinful but, rather it is because human beings are free that evil is always a possibility. Hence 'radical evil': the possibility of evil can never be excluded or radically eliminated.

Kant is therefore quick to exclude human nature as a cause for moral evil. He writes 'lest anyone be scandalized by the expression *nature*, which would stand in direct contradiction to

[31] Ibid
[32] Kant, *Religion* 55

the predicates morally good or *morally* evil if taken to mean (as it usually does) the opposite of the ground of actions (arising) from freedom, let it be noted that by "the nature of a human being" we only understand here the subjective ground.'[33] The grounds from which evil maxims and actions originate is called the "subjective ground" that is a space of moral freedom which is not 'any object *determining* the power of choice' but 'only in a rule that the power of choice itself produces for the exercise of its freedom.'[34] The grounds for evil maybe seen as unconscious, yet paradoxically every human being that does evil does so through the free exercise of practical reason and through this their actions are made imputable to them. Where the first grounds for adopting an evil maxim are actually found is therefore 'inscrutable' meaning the subjective choices for determining an evil maxim remain an ontological supposition that we are dimly aware but cannot fully comprehend. That is, although we can explain rationally how some evil actions take place, why such actions are chosen is reliant on desires and private motivations that are beyond comprehension. Attempts to 'explain' evil is therefore inexhaustible.

The basic architecture of radical evil as rooted in radical freedom is premised on the reformulation of the will, this accounts for the possibility that having real moral freedom means an agent can disobey rational incentives that want us to obey and act from duty. Kant divides the will into a dyad of functions: the *Wille* and the *Willkür.* Although, both *Wille* and *Willkür* belong to one faculty of "the will." According to Beck the difference between the two kinds of will is that the freedom of the *Wille* is determined by autonomy whereas the freedom of the *Willkür* is spontaneity.[35] In other words, the *Wille* is bound to practical reason and nothing outside of the moral law, by contrast the *Willkür* is more chaotic, therefore it may take practical reason for its modus operandi. But it is also rooted in spontaneity and as such 'It may take a

[33] Ibid 46
[34] Ibid
[35] Lewis White Beck, *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* 202

principle that is opposed to the law of pure practical reason, and then it is an evil will. In either case, it is a free will.'[36] The two functions of the "will", and in particular the *Willkür* allows the intelligibility of action that is consciously done in opposition to the moral law. Yet, *why* agents choose such an outcome remains fundamentally inscrutable for Kant.

The real significance of this move is the identification of evil with moral freedom and the more subtle point of elevating the will and transforming it into a positive instrument to remould a depraved or sinful human nature. The goal is to recreate a better political society, once the will is seen as essentially free and therefore moral. It is therefore an attempt to respond to critics who felt Kant was dawdling too much on asserting freedom. Furthermore, it is thanks to the will that we can see some dividing line between Kant and the Christian tradition. Augustine identified the will with the good but remained cautious of the defective will that was entangled with the pride, lust, greed, prejudice and ignorance. However, we ought to point out that Kant's identification of evil with moral freedom also released moral actions from any sense of control or obligation to anything higher than an increase in one's own freedom and the glorification of the will. If evil is related to our independent decisions and choices, and to have choice is the bedrock of morality, why couldn't choice ever be evil? Therefore, in binding evil and moral freedom, the possibility of evil seems also to bleed into the very fabric of the social and political institution we build and the ideologies that support it.

However, in Kant's defence, having moral choice allowed him to navigate past dualistic theories of evil, because evil actions were rooted in deliberate decisions, whose motivations and beliefs could be related together, rather than some innate quality to inflict evil that existed immemorially. In sum, choice made evil imputable to an agent's intentions or private beliefs, or desires, meaning that punitive or legislative enactments could be erected to remove evil. However, choice introduced a fragility and vulnerability into these categories, having choice

[36] Ibid 203

also meant a universe in which evil was more disseminated. If evil, is a product of our moral freedom, then it is also likely that our social encounters can easily turn on the hospitality and generosity of the will. Spontaneous moral freedom seemed to turn evil into something that was not only everywhere but also capable of undermining or indeed destroying the good that it was expected to uphold. In theory, freedom meant a radically divided will that empowered human beings to behave like moral saints as much as moral nihilists.

One way to tame the will from degenerating into an irreducible number of competing and possibly violent individual wills is for individuals to behave prudently and choose the correct moral maxims. Next to the supreme power of the will to will freely, and deliberately choose or reject morality, the other pillar of radical evil is the maxims willed contrary to, or in conformity to the moral law. In the *Groundwork*, Kant states that 'A maxim is the subjective principle for action, and must be distinguished from the objective principle, namely the practical law.'[37] In general maxims are rules that play the role of guiding individual action, in situations where there is a conflict between adopting maxims demanding how we ought to act and how we do act under pressure from our sensuous incentives. A maxim is therefore personal and subjective. It is stated as a rule against which I can determine how to act. The simplest way to decide between such conflicts is to choose the correct moral maxims that produce ends desired by the moral law.

In *Religion*, Kant brings this understanding of maxims closer to his subsequent account of moral freedom and this in turn clarifies how and why people choose to do evil action. One of the main points Kant is keen to reveal is that human propensity to moral evil resides in a single 'supreme maxim'.

> The human being (even the worst) does not repudiate the moral law, whatever his maxims, in rebellious attitude (by revoking obedience to it). The law rather imposes itself on him irresistibly, because of his moral predisposition; and if no other incentive were at work against it, he would also incorporate it into his supreme

[37] Kant, *Groundwork* 16

> maxim as sufficient determination of his power of choice, i.e., he would be morally good. He is, however, also dependent on the incentives of his sensuous nature because of his equally innocent natural predisposition, and he incorporates them into his maxim (according to the subjective principle of self).[38]

Kant is not saying that if we obey our natural inclinations at the expense of practical reason, we have adopted an evil maxim, he clearly states that human beings are 'also dependent on the incentives of his sensuous nature.'[39] It is the deliberate disregard of a moral pathway; when choosing evil is the morally more difficult decision that makes evil inscrutable. In this respects, he is casting aside theological determinism and a secular naturalism that holds that certain human vices like pride, jealousy or greed are accountable for the fall or in secular terms become the determining causes behind wicked behaviour. However, maxims are also only as faithful, sincere and respectful as the individuals willing them. To expect that the will could be stripped of its empirical character or sensuous inclinations and simultaneously converge into maxims of respectful reconciliation is far too optimistic on Kant's part. Kant was perhaps more than dimly aware of this; the horrors and barbarism of unrestrained human will were in plain sight; displayed vividly during and then in the aftermath of the French Revolution and then amply and more viciously still in the brutish competition among European nations for the exploitation and enrichment from overseas colonies.

Although Kant doesn't arrive at a definitive answer as to why human beings deliberately reject moral choices, he tells us how this takes place, by describing the formulation of maxims towards immoral ends. To begin with, good and evil maxims are internally constituted in such a manner that to follow the objective laws of practical reason or sensuous inclinations are presented as a choice inside of a single maxim.[40] In other words, just as a morally free and rational being must have the possibility to will good or evil action, so the maxims contain both

[38] Kant, *Religion* 59
[39] Ibid 58
[40] Ibid

rational and sensuous incentives that decide whether good or evil choices are determined. What takes place when we deliberately ignore moral incentives inside a maxim is not always deliberately malicious but rather the agent trying to do something moral but compromised to do so, or indeed trying to appear to do something moral whilst really satisfying some hidden personal desire. Kant puts the essential blurring of moral and immoral motivations in the following technical sense.

> Hence the difference, whether the human being is good or evil, must not lie in the difference between the incentives that he incorporates into his maxim (not in the material of the maxim) but in their *subordination* (in the form of the maxim): *which of the two he makes the condition of the other*. It follows that the human being (even the best) is evil only because he reverses the moral order of his incentives in incorporating them into his maxims.[41]

A possible cause of criticism here is that a quite procedural understanding of maxim is vulnerable to abuse. Arendt's discussion of Eichmann's use of the categorical imperative during his trial is illustrative of how maxims and moral rules can be manipulated against the moral law. Eichmann had (disingenuously) argued that his actions were morally commendable because he was guided by the (higher) moral law of the state which commanded him to obey the Führer. Eichmann was clearly manipulating the court to cover his own crimes because Kantian moral theory, also imposes obligations on the agent to make judgements over the moral law they are trying to universalise. Nevertheless, it highlighted how the notion of autonomy and moral maxims could be manipulated if the situation presented itself.

The Problem of Freedom: The Disposition and Propensity to Evil

In the previous two sections we have looked at the evolution of Kant's moral philosophy that led up to Kant's work *Religion*. Following this we also examined Kant's understanding of radical evil that is distinguished by a radical moral freedom and the use of moral maxims to guide moral actions, so that moral or indeed immoral actions are imputable to free moral agents.

[41] Ibid 59

On the matter of radical evil, we raised the potential difficulties with a concept of evil that is grounded in moral freedom. In particular, if freedom is grounded in autonomy, then this could in theory be used against freedom. Not simply in terms of minor transgressions against the moral law, but rather, radical spontaneity opened the door to freedom being used against the possibility of moral freedom itself. We might say that with radical evil Kant had pacified some of his critics and developed a more comprehensive 'secular' understanding of moral freedom, at the same time a supposedly secular concept of evil rooted in moral freedom was also double-edged sword. One that promised the possibility to free human nature and emancipate them from evil, but this promise could also deliver self-destruction in equal measures if moral choices were turned against the self.

In this section we want to look at the rest Kant's concept of radical evil. In particular we want to examine the most controversial contribution of radical evil to the discourse of evil. These are notions of *Gesinuung*, meaning a disposition, and *Hang*, meaning a propensity to evil action. Both these notions have been severely criticised for being not only incoherent but also turning evil into something that is universal or 'innate' in all human beings. As a result, the idea of *Gesinuung* and *Hang* seem to challenge the basic claims of moral freedom that underpin radical evil whilst also bringing up the ghost of Original Sin. What I hope to show in this section is that the picture is in fact quite mixed, that is whilst it cannot be denied that Kant gets mired in contradiction when claiming that human beings possess a self-chosen universal propensity to evil, it would be wrong to think that he has fallen into naturalism or dogmatism. Rather, these notions, *Gesinuung* and *Hang* are related to his preference for a middle-ground in his philosophy generally. In other words, whilst moral freedom had made radical evil appear secular, modern and enlightened, Kant we might speculate was aware of the problems of untrammelled autonomy. The notions of *Gesinuung* and *Hang* illustrate Kant's attempt to limit

human agency, by positing an evil character at the base of moral freedom and a universal propensity to radical evil.

Several commentators of Kant have noted the significance of the *Gesinuung* in Kant moral philosophy. According to Silber the *Gesinnung* is 'the most important single contribution of the *Religion* to Kant's ethical theory.'[42] Allison describes *Gesinnung* as 'the choices of rational agent or in his terms the maxims they adopt, must be conceived in relation to an underlying set of intentions, beliefs, interests and so on, which collectively constitute the agent's disposition or character.'[43] For Kant it stands as 'the first subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims'[44] and this means that we can 'infer *a priori* from a number of consciously evil actions, or even from a single one, an underlying evil maxim.'[45] Practically it gives continuity between the spontaneous will (*Willkür*), the site of its intentions, motivations, beliefs and the personality of the agent. Having a *Gesinuung* unites human action and therefore avoids what Michalson calls 'the sheer indeterminacy that would obtain if individual acts of maxim making were construed as simply spontaneous, disconnected and utterly unrelated to any common ground.'[46] Therefore, mass murderers, bloody vengeance or the abusive parent; the source of evil is a singular disposition, one and the same for all human beings. Importantly, it is also made clear that we cannot know what this original ground is, for it remains inscrutable to us. Kant writes of the disposition that 'there cannot be any further cognition of the subjective or the cause of this adoption (although we cannot avoid asking about it), for otherwise we would have to adduce still another maxim into which the disposition would have to be incorporated, and this maxim must in turn have its ground.'[47] The struggle between a disposition and free choice goes

[42] Silber, *Ethical*, pp CXIV-CXV.
[43] Allison, *Freedom* 136
[44] Kant, *Religion* 49
[45] Ibid 46
[46] Gordon E Michalson, "The Inscrutability of Moral Evil in Kant." *The Thomist* Vol 51, No. 2 (1987) 262
[47] Kant, *Religion* 50

on *ad infinitum* so that we can assume a self-chosen disposition makes humans moral and responsible.

The *Gesinnung* therefore provides a reference point to how evil characters are formed through the power of choice. On one side this is can be taken as a challenge to holding on to arguments for the origin of evil as arising through some inherited evil personality. On the face of it, Kant clearly goes out of his way to stress his differences from Original Sin

> Whatever the nature, however, of the origin of moral evil in the human being, of all the ways of representing its spread and propagation through the members of our species and in all generations, the most inappropriate is surely to imagine it as having come to us by way of inheritance from our first parents; for then we could say of moral evil exactly what the poet says of the good: *genus et proavos, et quoae non fecimus ipsi, vix ex nostra puto*.[48]

However, the suspicion that Kant is clinging on to some notion of Original Sin, whether through radical evil or the notion of *Gesinuung* has never been completely refuted ever since Goethe complained about the stain of radical evil. In recent years, Milbank has reframed this point and argued that Kant is providing an enlightenment substitution of Original Sin. Milbank interprets Kant's reformulation of the will into that of 'untrammelled autonomy'[49] as a modern recasting of Adam's self-belief in his own intrinsic goodness. This conviction of the will as good in itself 'was invented by Adam at the fall' and has thus set up 'an illusionary autonomy, or self-governance of the will' that placed creatures with a self-possessive will as the 'appointed substantive end.'[50] In light of this we may understand a frequently cited passage in which Kant states 'This evil is radical, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims.'[51] Taken at face value, if the grounds of radical evil are inscrutable this may be taken as a departure from Kant's sense that morality is innate and therefore marks a retreat into Christianity theology.

[48] Kant, *Religion*, pp 62-63
[49] John Milbank, 'Darkness and Silence: Evil and the Western Legacy' In *Evil in Contemporary Political Theory* ed Bruce Haddock, Peri. Roberts, and Peter Sutch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)14
[50] Ibid 18
[51] 59

Although, human beings are born with freedom and are innately moral, evil still remains too autonomous, too radical and too resilient, so that we still adopt our evil inclinations. One implication of this is that to do evil, one must also be evil or have an evil character in some respects and this can be seen in Kant's distinction of *fragility*, *impurity* and *depravity* as making up the *Gesinuung*.

However, isn't Kant upholding two contradictory theoretical claims here? If dispositions are self-chosen, this challenges the basic intuition that dispositions are natural or psychologically innate. He attempts to rescue the paradox by stating that 'Moreover, to have the one or the other disposition by nature as an innate characteristic does not mean here the disposition has not been earned by the human being who harbors it.'[52] Kant though, hesitates in telling us what the relationship between an underlying disposition and morally free choices is. For example, is it pride arising from the fall, natural human aggression or bad socialisation. In defence of Kant, we might say, the relationship between an underlying ground that is evil and individual actions that are freely chosen is always quite messy. Consider the example of a violent sexual offender. If there is evidence that such an individual has committed these crimes on multiple occasions and there is a recurring history of sexual crimes and evidence displaying violent sexual fantasies. Do we consider this the result of an innately depraved disposition? The evidence may indicate this, but then this would obtrude the moral freedom and culpability of the agent. Kant wants to affirm moral responsibility but his notion of having an underlying supreme maxim that dictates individual choices seems to get him entangled in quite intractable tensions.

Indeed, the claim that Kant has colluded with Original Sin, either as enlightenment substitution as Milbank believes, or through his own clever philosophical language as was suspected by Goethe is compounded by the notion of human beings having propensity to evil.

[52] Kant, *Religion* 50

Most of the perplexity towards radical evil originates in the idea of a propensity to evil. Again, this chafes with Kant's respect for moral freedom and responsibility because propensity speaks of some deeper underlying cause or nature that determines human action whether we are conscious of it or not. Kant describes propensity in the following terms:

> By *propensity* (*propensio*) I understand the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination (habitual desire, *concupiscentia*), insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general. It is distinguished from a predisposition in that a propensity can indeed be innate yet may be represented as not being such: it can be thought of (if it is good) as acquired, or (if evil) as brought by the human being upon himself.[53]

Although, the distinction between 'natural' propensity that is innate, and a 'moral' propensity that is freely chosen, is deliberately made by Kant to offset the conclusion that he is supporting and an austere naturalism that extinguishes moral freedom entirely. Kant's goes on to assert the *universal* nature of the propensity to evil.

> It will be noted that the propensity to evil is here (as regards actions) in the human being, even the best; and so it also must be if it is to be proved that the propensity to evil among human beings is universal, or, which here amounts to the same thing, that it is woven into human nature.'[54]

The insistence on a universal propensity to evil raises doubts over how compatible practical reason is with radical evil. If there is a pre-existing *inclination* in the propensity how much moral choice is there to avoid evil? Furthermore, if a moral propensity is something that results from the subjective ground, then how does one conceptualise the idea of being accountable for a propensity that seemingly exists universally in this subjective ground? This incoherence has led Bernstein to suggest that Kant is irredeemably confused about radical evil:

> Kant is at war with himself. For, on the one hand, he never wants to compromise the basic claim of his moral philosophy: that human beings as finite rational agents are free, which means that they are solely and completely responsible for their moral choices and for the maxims they adopt.…. On the other hand, Kant also wants to affirm that all human beings have an innate propensity to moral evil. In order to

[53] Kant, *Religion* pp 52-3
[54] Ibid 54

> have his cake and eat it too, he is driven to claim that even though this propensity is woven into the fabric of human nature, it is a propensity that springs from our freedom, and for which we are responsible.[55]

Bernstein stresses that radical evil springs from our freedom, but Kant's insistence on a propensity to evil has still encouraged an empirical interpretation of radical evil. This might easily be understood as wanting to give radical evil some scientific respectability and therefore differentiate propensity from Christian understandings of sin that was raised both by Goethe and Milbank. Wood writes that 'Kant explicitly attributes the corruption of human nature to the social condition of human beings, and more specifically to the concern over comparative self-worth that characterizes people whenever they live in proximity to one another.'[56]

One difficulty of using an empirical argument for positing a universal propensity evil is that Kant seems to have been quite sceptical of experience as a proof for theorising how or why evil action takes place, noting that 'we cannot observe maxims, we cannot do so unproblematically even within ourselves; hence the judgement that an agent is an evil human being cannot reliably be based on experience.'[57] Presumably, clinging onto an empirical interpretation of human evil opened the door to seeing some human beings as naturally depraved which 'makes of the human a purely *animal* being; a reason exonerated from the moral law, an *evil reason* as it were'[58] and therefore beyond culpability. Instead, human beings rationally choose evil, seeing them as biologically or psychologically determined also compromises their actions as the product of some innate demonic disposition which is outside the purview of rational morality. The role of reason in understanding and motivating evil action is constitutive for the 'law rather imposes itself on him irresistibly, because of his moral predisposition.'[59] In sum, empirical naturalism as well as Christian sinfulness were both

[55] Bernstein, *Radical Evil* 33
[56] Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) 288
[57] Kant, *Religion*, 46
[58] Ibid 58
[59] Ibid

opposed to the rational agency used as the foreground of radical evil; assigning moral blame to an eponymous ancestor or naturalising some social trait introduced an unhealthy heteronomy into the intelligibility of evil that was opposed to the basic conditions of practical reason that demanded human beings be understood as rational, free and morally responsible.

The questions and criticisms raised against Kant's notion of moral agency has perhaps naturally drifted towards looking at it through the lens of Kant the secular philosopher. One of the aims of this chapter is to point out that Kant viewed radical evil through a religious lens just as much as a secular one. Kant's struggle with moral agency and his desire to assert a dispositional ground that not only allows for evil but is grounded in an evil character can be understood as a desire to limit untrammelled agency that his reformulation of the will implied. That is, having an evil disposition and moral freedom creates a 'divided' agent. On this account, to assert moral freedom one has to restrain ones natural and moral propensity to evil. There is a need to will a moral action in the face of a disposition that is prone to self-love. My point is that it creates a finite agency, that is struggling with its own evil and not the untrammelled autonomy Milbank believed was Kant's 'dark' legacy.

In the end, we ought to accept the idea that Kant remains committed to what might be called a broadly Christian understanding of evil. The basic assertion that we disobey the moral law while knowing it is a transgression allows us to view the moral freedom as still shackled by paradox and guilt. That is, despite our best intentions of realising our predisposition to the good i.e., *animality*, *humanity* and *personality*, we have to accept that because we possess moral autonomy, we are also incapable of protecting our autonomy from the possibilities that are latent within ourselves or others. Whilst Milbank sees in this a dangerous idea that ultimately became inverted into a tyrannical will. Kant wanted human beings to recognise a sense of humility before God that comes with moral freedom that guards against both a tyrannical will and some kind of relativism through the use of moral maxims. That is radical evil may also

imply that the propensity to evil means 'we begin in sin' and the will has to battle the urge to self-love to become virtuous. For many secularists this is exactly the point of radical evil's secularity. Kant devolves God's power and the obligation to obey God onto human self-obligation. It is human will that leads us towards virtue and the ethical improvement to struggle against evil.

But it is also worth pointing out that Kant seems to be wrestling with a more intractable problem and that is moral freedom is severely compromised if the will that constitutes it is a fundamentally corrupted *Gesinnung*. Our ability to save ourselves through autonomous moral action seems to be crippled by a will that is strangely unable to will whilst willing. This problem has antecedents as it was speculated by Augustine and reformers with regard to whether a fallen will could ever give rise to righteous deeds. McMullin believes this paradox is tied to Kant's conviction that human beings are always moral failures pushed along by the guilt of knowing this existential shortcoming. She suggests that.

> Our tendency to choose self-love over morality must be conceived as being ultimately grounded in an act of freedom that inverts the appropriate hierarchy – an act, therefore, which is not empirically enacted but rationally posited as the cause of all specific failures to live up to the moral law. Finding ourselves already having failed to perfectly follow reason, practical rationality demands that we posit a cause for this failure – a cause for which we can understand ourselves to be responsible.'[60]

Human beings are ring-fenced by moral freedom and radical evil. This paradoxical situation is exemplified in the fact that the 'act' of self-love over the moral law is a timeless intelligible choice that only reason can comprehend. If all human beings were born with a good disposition instead of an evil one, their struggle with freedom would not be so intense and therefore could not help us fathom the crucial paradox of why people who know the moral law yet deliberately choose to reject it. For Kant it is important that we own and take responsibility for our

[60] Irene McMullin, 'Kant on Radical Evil and the Origin of Moral Responsibility', *Kantian Review*, Vol 18, No. 1 (2013) 54

limitations, even if we can conceive them only rationally and not empirically. It follows that to give moral life some kind integrity, we have to posit that radical evil arises not from a specific 'empirical deed', but an overriding rule that establishes the dominance of self-love over morality universally amongst the species. We cannot see this rule or indeed describe it, but only presuppose that it is an intelligible deed.

This sense of moral and rational finitude involves a constant existential struggle to assert one's moral freedom. It may also help us see why Kant rejected diabolical evil as a rational choice and therefore may answer Silber's objection to radical evil, according to which 'Kant's ethics is inadequate to understanding Auschwitz because 'Kant denies the possibility of the deliberate rejection of the moral law. Not even a wicked person, Kant holds can will evil for the sake of evil.' [61] In fairness to Kant, at the beginning of the radical evil essay, he makes it clear that his aim is to begin with an ethical standpoint in which human beings fall between the moral extremes. This is down to the fact that human beings are 'good in some parts and evil in others. Experience even seems to confirm this middle position between the two extremes.'[62] Kant's rejection of diabolical is part of his desire of not wanting to transcendentalise evil. In taking people out of this middle ground and identifying them with the monstrous extreme, and as such make these characters or actions unintelligible to reason. Perhaps this can be seen as hypocritical given his positing of an evil disposition. Yet, Silber's presumption that the most horrific acts or persons are motivated by a devilish desire to harm of humiliate one's victims therefore assigns to such perpetrators a kind of depravity that Kant was reluctant to accept as the outcome of rational morality.

Furthermore, Kant is not rejecting the diabolical as a possibility for human beings. The second stage of the predisposition to human nature accounts for the malicious use of self-love.

[61] John Silber, *Kant's Ethics: The Good, Freedom And The Will* (Berlin, De Gruyter 2012) 333
[62] Kant, *Religion* 47

Kant's basic grounding of evil in moral freedom opens the possibility that freedom maybe directed against both morality and freedom. However, Kant's disavowal of the diabolical means that evil for evil's sake did not reflect his valuation that human beings *in general* pursued evil as the only end. Indeed, the precondition for moral freedom is that the 'human being (even the worst) does not repudiate the moral law whatever his maxims, in rebellious attitude (by revoking obedience to it). The law rather imposes itself, because of his moral disposition.'[63] Therefore, to disavow morality entirely and to spite the moral law was a dispositional trait Kant felt was not constitutive of morally free accountable persons under the power of the moral law. This point is made clearer in view of 'The Reciprocity Thesis'. According to Allison it 'is the claim that freedom of the will and the moral law are reciprocal concepts.'[64] Individuals that are motivated by incentives against morality are not really morally free which excludes them from obligations and responsibility for evil. The relationship between evil and freedom is re-iterated in *Religion.*

> To think of oneself as a freely acting being, yet as exempted from the one law commensurate to such a being (the moral law) would amount to the thought of a cause operating without any law at all (for the determination according to natural law is abolished on account of freedom): and this is a contradiction.[65]

Kant is not excluding the possibility that some people are willing to destroy themselves in order make sure the other is destroyed or that others derive a sadistic pleasure of maximising suffering. The context of *Religion*, published in 1794, coincides with some of the most deadly and violent episodes of the French revolution. Kant was well aware of how diabolical ends could be pursued. Rather the question is whether evil can be imputed to such individuals who are seemingly out of control and enslaved to ideologies, desires or hate. Submitting evil to the boundaries of morality and reason avoids the temptation to idealise perpetrators and see them

[63] Kant, *Religion* 58
[64] Henry Allison, On the Very Idea of a Propensity to Evil, *The Journal of Value Inquiry* Vol 36 (2002) 344
[65] Kant, *Religion* 58

as beyond hope or redemption. Rather, such perpetrators must remain flawed failures like the rest of humanity, condemned because of poor choices and not elevated into an exclusive category and therefore allow a different set of moral judgements or laws apply to them. In this manner he guards against scientific naturalism; explaining evil as a result of natural cruelty, aggression, and religious explanations that see human beings as lacking in real freedom thanks to the inheritance of sin.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by pointing out the idea of 'cross-pressures' within the secular age and how these have contributed to producing intellectuals and movements that desire to find a middle position between religious belief or transcendence and exclusive humanism or immanence. The 'traditional' interpretation of Kant views him as proponent or even a cheerleader for secular reason thanks to his dismantling of the metaphysical proofs for God and his philosophy of moral autonomy. This can be seen in Bernstein's remark that 'if a secular society is defined as one in which belief in God "as one option amongst others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace" (Taylor 2007:3), then Kant may well be hailed as the philosopher of our secular age.'[66] What I have endeavoured to advance in this chapter is that such claims as presented by Bernstein are complicated by Kant's detour into radical evil and in particular the fact that he very clearly relies on Christianity to give some intelligibility to evil.

The paradoxes within radical evil that Bernstein in particular has pointed are real, however these are not solely because of some failure of Kant to work out a clearer explanation of evil and therefore an exclusively secular concept. Instead, Kant refers back constantly to Christianity in *Religion*, whether it is to the *Gesinuung*, *Hang*, grace, Jesus, Paul or the holiness of the law. Kant's reliance on Christian conceptualisations, theological debates and biblical imagery makes it difficult to think that he was entirely focused on defending a secular

[66] Richard Bernstein, "The Secular-Religious Divide: Kant's Legacy." *Social Research* Vol 76, No. 4 (2009) 1036

conception of evil. Kant is not struggling with religion or trying to free himself from it in as much as it is something inescapable for him. Kant evolved from the good will of the *Groundwork* because its lack of absolute freedom was seen as too limiting and therefore too Christian for an enlightenment culture intent on remodelling humanity and the world. The solution of spontaneous moral freedom presented as radical evil only succeeded in making evil into a radical possibility or indeed a moral propensity that plagued every human action. That is, in identifying evil and moral freedom, Kant also succeeded in turning evil into something that was either nihilistic (the freedom to disobey freedom) or something resembling Original Sin (evil as a disposition and propensity).

The continued significance of Christianity ought not to be taken as Kant reverting away from his critical project. But rather an affirmation that Christianity lives on inside of the space of the secular. Kant psychologises and even de-transcendentalises evil, but its fundamental grounds remain inscrutable. Kant also binds moral responsibility with individual autonomy but how we become responsible if we inherit an evil propensity appears inscrutable. I don't believe these can be blamed on lapses in reasoning alone. Kant is pointing to something significant with regards to the limits of secular reason and limits of moral freedom to fully comprehend evil without some reference to religion. Critics may interpret this as a capitulation to the 'God of the gaps' syndrome. But I think this is to conflate 'being' secular with the need to disenchant the world of transcendence. For, Kant the world is meaningful or purposeful, and one way this meaning shows up is in free human action done in accordance to pure practical reason, another way it shows itself is through love and grace. To think that evil can be understood only within a secular or religious register constitutes the kind of all-knowing and self-confident hubris that is so utterly destructive and a warning of the radical evil he was alerting humanity to.

7. The Incomprehensibility of Radical and Banal Evil

A considerable portion of twentieth-century discussion on evil has been shaped by Hannah Arendt through her two most famous works, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (*OT*) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (*EJ*). In 1946, Arendt announced that the problem of evil was the biggest intellectual challenge for Europe to contemplate, and therefore come to terms with moving forward.[1] Whilst Europe didn't take much notice of Arendt's prophecy, or indeed evil until recently, Arendt throughout her career as an academic and charismatic public intellectual returns time and again to the question of evil. Not just in *OT* or *EJ*, but also in later works like *Responsibility and Judgemen*t (*RJ*) or *The Life of the Mind* (*LM*) that cover the causes behind the collapse of social morality in Germany during the 1930's as well as the problem of moral judgement as factors enabling the perpetration of evil.

The evil Arendt is confronting is the holocaust but more generally also the entire political structures and intellectual understanding that allowed millions of people to be herded into ghettos, brutalised of their dignity and pushed through a mechanised factory system built to annihilate them. There had been wars, massacres and sadistic killing all through human history, but Arendt believes there was something deeply incomprehensible about designing and creating a system whose sole ends was to maximise the killing of people. The incomprehensibility of totalitarian evil, therefore, presents a life-long challenge and obsession of comprehending evil. Traditionally evils could be comprehended through grasping reasons or motives but the holocaust also 'breaks-down all standards' and presents a 'rupture within civilisation.' How could you to evaluate actions motives or reasons where motives and reasons were second thoughts or entirely absent? The holocaust was destructive but also destroyed the measurements to comprehend destruction. Furthermore, the holocaust took place in Europe, the home of enlightened civilisation, no-one could look at scientific experimentation, moral

[1] Bernstein, *Radical Evil* 206

freedom and political participation with the same degree of certainty or conviction, that they were meant for the good or were 'progressing' humanity. The holocaust, its violence, its rationality, its coldness estranged us from the world and alienated us from each other. Arendt remarks in the preface of *OT*, she confesses that the work was written against a background of 'reckless despair' and because 'everything seems to have lost specific value, and has become unrecognizable for human comprehension.'[2] The temptation was to walk away from the challenge of comprehension, to forget, accept or surrender through silence.

Arendt though doesn't allow silence or indeed apathy to overcome her, nor remove her, from the urgent task of making sense of the incomprehensible. The focus of her writings was to interrogate evil, to confront its horror, to face its brutality and ultimately recognise its human fingerprints. Arendt produced two understandings of evil that are at face value taken as completely opposite conceptualisations of evil but are in fact better understood as two sides of the same coin. In *OT*, she declares that 'in the final stages of totalitarianism an absolute evil appears (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives), it is also that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil.'[3] Her rendering of evil as something absolute seems to transport evil out of history and bequeaths upon it an otherness that undermines the task of comprehending evil, even if we ultimately cannot comprehend evil. Furthermore, this assessment of evil as radical or absolute seems to be at odds with her later judgement of Eichmann as banal. In *EJ*, she insisted that he didn't fit the image of a 'demonic' perpetrator trumpeted by the media and court alike, after his capture in Argentina. Instead, she stressed that 'The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.'[4]

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[2] Arendt, *Origins*, x
[3] Arendt, *Origins*, xi
[4] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: *A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London, Penguin 2006) 276

The aim of this chapter is to wade through the controversies and questions provoked by radical and banal evil. What we shall argue is that both assessments are in fact part of the same challenge of comprehending the incomprehensible. For Arendt, the singularity or uniqueness of the holocaust was refracted into different kinds of incomprehensibility, meaning new tools of human understanding were needed. The absolute evil of factory-style killing, of rendering human beings into superfluous fodder was perversely matched in the cold, technocratic and bland officials operating the levers of these killing machines. Eichmann was not a 'monster' as represented in the quintessential Nazi, donned in the 'sadistic' paraphernalia of the Reich, yet his ordinariness made him more chillingly incomprehensible. In *EJ*, Arendt overturned our most basic intuitions regarding the nature of 'great evil' and the personal dispositions of the perpetrators behind them. Significantly, Arendt drawing on the incomprehensible to make sense of evil is a reminder of the working of the religious register still operating in her thoughts on evil. Bernstein believes that in her usage of radical evil 'we can discern a theological aura to her thinking.'[5] We shall emphasise that the theological aura noted by Bernstein is in fact something more embedded in Arendt and in fact helps her to comprehend the holocaust, the banality of Eichmann and the absolute evil of the camps. Indeed, a point of continuity, implicit in both *OT* and *EJ*, is the relationship to Augustine. Mathewes believes Arendt takes 'Augustine's basic ontological framework.'[6] This chapter does not merely attempt to present Arendt's supposedly shifting view on evil. Instead, the chapter shows that a certain continuity exists between 'radical' evil and its 'banal' manifestation in Eichmann and the broader context of totalitarianism. Thus, the chapter questions the often-assumed break that purportedly exists between these two conceptions – and does so by looking at Arendt's appropriation of Augustine. The argument here explores a common thread uniting these variations, namely, a

[5] Bernstein, *Radical Evil* 213
[6] Charles Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004) 195

thread that speaks to Arendt's Augustinian resistance to reduce evil either to the 'demonic' or otherwise to a Manichean duality of the good and evil, through the sense in which the incomprehensibility of evil is derived from it having no overriding nature, essence, cause, motive or intention that would make it possible to comprehend evil. This connection is cemented through Augustine's notion of the will's *cupiditas* or habituation toward evil. Arendt's call for the affirmation of political action is her way of mounting resistance against the *'habituation' of evil taken as banal*. This notion of habituation, that we shall develop later is taken from Augustine but reformulated into the context of the collapse of social morality in 1930's Germany. Indeed, this Augustinian common thread, as will be seen, should not interest us merely on the basis of our concern with Arendt's exegesis. Rather, what the thread shows is that, even where a sincere and powerful attempt is made to disentangle evil, in either of its 'radical' or 'banal' variations, from its religious codification, the notion itself puts up a resistance that is difficult to overcome.

This chapter is divided into six sections that go through the evolution of Arendt's thought in her attempt to comprehend the incomprehensibility of evil: (i) looks at radical evil and her belief that totalitarianism had created a rupture in comprehending evil; (ii) is her dialogue with Karl Jaspers prior to completing *OT*, Jaspers introduced her to the idea of the banality of evil; (iii) in this section we examine her perception of Eichmann as a motiveless perpetrator and therefore representing a deeper level of the incomprehensibility of evil (iv) Arendt's indebtedness to Augustine in comprehending the normalisation of violence and totalitarianism in German society (v) we note the continuing significance of privation theory upon banality through Arendt's re-formulation of evil as 'thoughtlessness' and 'shallowness' and finally (vi) a brief conclusion.

The Incomprehensibility of 'Radical Evil'

The aim of this section is to introduce Arendt's re-interpretation of radical evil. For Arendt, evil is radical, but not in the Kantian sense of self-interest, or comprehensible motives that arise from a failure to order moral maxims properly. Arendt's use of radical evil is meant to underlie the fundamental incomprehensibility of totalitarian evil that is not only absolute evil but also explodes the categories meant to make evil intelligible. In other words, evil is incomprehensible because our traditional categories are no longer able to account for actions that are neither rational nor intelligible. Arendt's point on the incomprehensibility is focused on the essentially 'novel' nature of totalitarian evil; something that inexplicably turns rationality against rationality and freedom against freedom.

Arendt's interest in evil was already present in her dissertation *Love and Saint Augustine*, but perhaps became more personal and existential from 1933, with the consolidation of the Third Reich's power, and the normalisation of antisemitism through terror. Arendt was apprehended in Berlin during 1933, and interned in France during 1940, but managed to escape France in 1941. Arendt's use of radical evil in *OT*, is meant as a withering critique of the common-sense interpretation of totalitarian evil. On the one hand, allied war propaganda had created this image of a violent beastly and irrational Third Reich, and hence a simplistic Manichean evil overrunning Western civilisation. Arendt also targeted the historical discourse of evil that explains terror and violence, through a rational or a utilitarian calculus, whereby, human action is instrumentally geared towards maximising power or wealth, so that violence is a means to achieve those ends. Arendt believes there is an essential continuity between biblical theology and modern thought in comprehending evil.

> It is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a 'radical evil,' and this is true both for Christian theology, which conceded even to the devil himself a celestial origin, as well as for Kant, the only philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least must have suspected the existence of this evil

> even though he immediately rationalized it in the concept of a 'perverted ill will' that could be explained by comprehensible motives.[7]

Arendt's usage of 'radical evil' is meant to capture the excessiveness of totalitarian evil rather than a bad will or self-interest. For instance, she states that 'It is the appearance of some radical evil, previously unknown to us.'[8] And in this respect, it differs from Kant who disavowed the *diabolical* and limited his own analysis of evil to disobeying moral incentives for the sake of self-love. For Arendt, there was no point looking at moral vices like 'envy' or 'pride' to explain motivations or responsibility for evil action. The holocaust had been carried out by a political system, built on absolute power and limitless violence, it was therefore no longer limited to thinking in terms of traditional conceptualisations, meaning liberal or religious explanations of immoral behaviour could not make sense of the 'logic' behind the death camps, or the reasons behind slave labour.

It is therefore a considerably more expansive understanding of radical evil that Arendt is utilising. According to Villa, 'the preponderant sense of Arendt's analysis is that this is something radically new in the realm of human affairs, something undreamt of even by the most bloodthirsty of tyrants.'[9] To be sure, totalitarian evil satisfied the bloodlust and psychotic irrationalism of some its most fanatical followers. However, it was evil that fed off a 'system' that perpetuated chaos and order, in a way that had neither been conceived let alone put into practice.

> The trouble with totalitarian regimes is not that they play power politics in an especially ruthless way, but that behind their politics is hidden an entirely new and unprecedented concept of power, just as behind their *Realpolitik* lies an entirely new and unprecedented concept of reality. Supreme disregard for immediate consequences rather than ruthlessness; rootlessness and neglect of national interests rather than nationalism; contempt for utilitarian motives rather than unconsidered pursuit of self-interest; 'idealism,' i.e., their unwavering faith in an ideological fictitious world, rather than lust for power – these have all introduced into

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, Penguin, 2017) 602
[8] Ibid 581
[9] Dan Villa, 'Terror and Radical Evil' in *Politics in Philosophy and Terror*: *Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1999) 13

> international politics a new and more disturbing factor than mere aggressiveness would have been able to.[10]

What this new concept of reality brings is the 'contempt for factuality' that emancipates human action from any received political tradition and most of all from any standard of moral judgement. Totalitarianism is therefore free to pursue actions as aimless and incomprehensible as it feels necessary for its ideological purpose.

The incomprehensibility of totalitarian radical evil is exemplified in its disavowal of the nihilistic principle that 'everything is permitted' to a new form of domination that transcends this principle and assumes 'everything is possible.'[11] Both 'religious' and 'secular' worldviews conceived evil within an instrumental framework whereby evil actions were explicable in terms of motivation or in the worst situations a goal to maximise suffering. A conventional way to explain human action rationally, and as such the violence of the holocaust, is in relation to the war effort and in particular the material needs of free labour for strategic advantages. For the Nazis, such calculations were second thoughts, the goal was extermination. This meant pummelling factories with scarce recourses that actually subverted military victory. For this reason, traditional utilitarian calculations of self-preservation went out of the window, and this can only mean so did traditional assumptions over the nature of evil, and the motivations or rational calculations behind them.

> The incredibility of the horrors is closely bound up with their economic uselessness. Nazis carried this uselessness to the point of open anti-utility when in the midst of the war, despite the shortage of building material and rolling stock, they set up enormous, costly extermination factories and transported millions of people back and forth. In the eyes of a strictly utilitarian world the obvious contradiction between these acts and military expediency gave the whole enterprise an air of mad unreality.[12]

[10] Arendt, *Origins* 546
[11] Ibid pp 576-77
[12] Arendt, *Origins* pp 582-3

It seemed futile to comprehend the evil actions of a political system built on novel political ideas about power and violence with categories rooted in practical or rational reality. There was an unfathomable paradox at the heart of this novel form of radical evil that simply defied conventional explanations. At the centre of this unfathomability are the concentration camps as the central institution of totalitarian domination and whose basic aim was to achieve:

> Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other.[13]

It is in these 'laboratories' of totalitarian regimes that the paradoxes of a liberal faith in human autonomy is exposed by Arendt and where the totalitarian dogma of everything possible is brought to fruition. In the camps the end goal was destruction with no utility beside destruction as the goal. It's recklessness in pursuit of its goal of destruction for the sake of destruction threw into doubt the very dichotomy of 'good' and 'evil.'

> When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death; when suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family – how is he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil but between murder and murder.[14]

The achievement of the camps was it pushed suffering beyond any comprehensible motives or reason. This rested on a new understanding of the possibilities of human action exemplified by rethinking the nihilistic credo that everything was possible including self-destruction. Later in *The Human Condition* (*HC*) Arendt was to discuss the underpinnings of this new understanding as defined by *Homo Faber*, meaning the historical priority given to *vita contemplativa* or the contemplative life was superseded in modernity by 'making and fabricating.'[15] The key expectation of *Homo Faber* is that humans can control nature and remake the natural process

[13] Arendt, *Origins* 573
[14] Ibid 593
[15] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2 ed, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2018) pp 295-7

through a radical application of the will upon nature. The horror and the absolute radical evil of the camps was illustrated by this unwavering commitment to the principle of 'making and fabricating.' This was translated into a self-assurance that everything that possessed biological material could be destroyed and remade anew.

Nothing exemplifies the failure of autonomy more than the camps where the belief that everything was possible meant 'creating a society in which the nihilistic banality of *homo homini lupus* is consistently realised.'[16] Instead of autonomy bequeathing a respect for moral reciprocity, what takes place in the camps is it radicalised this belief in the possibilities of human autonomy, that is, inverted back for the purpose of destroying autonomy for the service of creating something new. Removing any fabric of spontaneity and isolating the camps from the outside world also sealed the psychological rupture to the world of activity. Indeed, to have private motivations or personal hatreds meant the agent was attuned to and could have a meaningful relationship to their reflective thoughts or muster together a moral conscience. This was deeply problematic, given to have any whisper of personal intention or motivation implied a meaningful connection to the world, which could usurp or obtrude the ideological *telos* of totalitarian societies and ultimately the goal of the camps.

Arendt methodically outlines how the transformation of human nature and the creation of superfluous humanity in the camps took place. The first step in asserting total domination was to kill the juridical person. This was achieved 'by putting certain categories of people outside the protection of the law'[17] so that normal juridical procedure didn't apply. The following stage in making humans superfluous is the murder of the moral person. This is done by making the human being complicit in their own suffering. The choice between murder and murder deprives human beings from their place in the moral world, by taking away their power to find

[16] Ibid 601
[17] Ibid 586

forgiveness and remorse. The final stage in transforming human nature into a living corpse was through divesting the individual of their unique identity. Arendt notes that personal identity was the most difficult to destroy.[18] The ultimate objective is destroying human individuality as the capacity to think and act spontaneously. Indeed, the spectacle of millions of docile humans being marched into death camps reminds us of effaced individuality as we are confronted with 'ghastly marionettes with human faces.'[19]

The problematic posed to the reader is that totalitarian evil doesn't look like or feel like any evil that has been inflicted or even dared thought of before. Arendt writes that 'we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know.'[20] Therefore, without typically utilitarian calculations to measure the causes behind human behaviour and the inversion of the nihilistic credo in the functioning of the camps making destruction the end of all action, the task of comprehending the holocaust looks entirely out of the reach of human rationality. At the same time Arendt is not intent on reducing the challenge of radical evil to silence or indeed derail the urgent task of comprehension.

Comprehending the holocaust is difficult and may even ultimately prove completely outside the possibility of human understanding, but it remains a historical fact, and therefore something that we have to comprehend. Arendt is therefore not interested in silence, or turning away and therefore not engaging with totalitarianism, its causes, motivations or goals. Arendt defends understanding because 'it is the specifically human way of being alive'[21] this doesn't mean that once we have identified the reasons or motives for human activity, understanding stops rather 'Understanding is unending and therefore cannot produce final results'[22] and is something that

[18] Ibid 594
[19] Ibid 597
[20] Ibid 602
[21] Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*: *Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism* ed Jerome Kohn (Schocken Book, New York 1994) 308
[22] Ibid

'begins with birth and ends with death.'[23] In the absence of understanding we become prey to ideologues intent on destroying 'the activity of understanding altogether.'[24] To become apathetic in the face of radical evil and say that the 'dead possess a secret that the living cannot understand,' or to believe that understanding ultimately humanises the perpetrator and robs the victim of its suffering, both represent a victory for totalitarianism, that wants to deny hope. Despite the incomprehensibility of evil, understanding and comprehending is 'profoundly and fundamentally human'[25] meaning the novelty of totalitarianism, the radical evil of the camps or the perversity of its ideology have to be intelligible if we are to bear our commitment to the dead as much as understanding ourselves.

Yet the paradox remains, if we are compelled to understand by virtue of being human, how do we understand evil so novel and unprecedented that it essentially destroys our categories to make sense of it? How do we pull ourselves from these bootstraps? Arendt notes the 'most obvious escape from this predicament is the equation of totalitarian government with some well-known evil of the past.'[26] In this context, totalitarianism is identified with 'old and familiar evils'[27] its lust for power and aggressive land grab is a synonym of the evil perpetrated by imperialism or other historical tyrannies. The strategy is to reduce totalitarianism to a set of historical or social causes that binds evils immemorially so that 'whatever is unfamiliar and needs to be understood in a welter of familiarities and plausibilities.'[28] However, the search for comprehension through analogies, counterfactuals, thought-experiments or revealing a single cause that define the 'scientific approach' amounts to a resignation of understanding, a retreat into the comfort of common-sense as opposed to true understanding. What such interpreters fail to grasp is the incomprehensibility of totalitarian radical evil was that it also exemplified

[23] Ibid
[24] Ibid
[25] Ibid 309
[26] Ibid 309
[27] Ibid 312
[28] Ibid 313

those traits that revealed the 'essence' of the enlightenment through illustrating 'human capacity to begin, that power to think and to act in ways that are new, contingent, and unpredictable that looms so large in her mature political theory… the paradox of totalitarian novelty was that it represented an assault on that very ability to act and think as a unique individual.'[29] Therefore, Arendt's more considered point on the 'novelty' of totalitarian evil was that it revealed the paradoxes of the enlightenment project of using freedom to realise human dignity, individual rights and moral autonomy because these virtues were actually turned against themselves by political behaviour intent on wiping out these virtues out. She writes that 'There is only one thing that seems discernible: we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous.'[30]

Arendt has no definitive or final answer on how we understand something that destroys the basic language and grammar of understanding. Rather, the challenge of understanding is that be allowed to continue, and we must avoid falling into despair or even simplistic common-sense. Liberal intellectual culture believes that radical evil can be comprehended through analysing human action by assigning its causes to instrumental rationality and utilitarian self-interest. Yet in doing so, it demonstrates its inability to comprehend and its failure to properly understand. Furthermore, novelty or newness is not an obstruction or indeed an excuse to not understand. Understanding is continuous with being human and therefore making sense of the incomprehensible is difficult but also an on-going inexhaustible process of generating new understandings and living with (may be for the time being) inexplicable contradictions. Arendt observes that 'True understanding does not tire of interminable dialogue and "vicious circles," because it trusts the imagination eventually catch at least a glimpse of the always frightening light of truth.'[31] This standard of understanding was applied to her original preconception of

[29] Margaret Canovan, 'Arendt's theory of totalitarianism: a reassessment' *in The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed Dana Villa (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2000) 27
[30] Arendt, *Origins* 602
[31] Arendt, *Understanding* 322

evil as radical that later becomes evil that is banal. Although we are tempted to see these conceptions of evil as radically opposed to one another and therefore represent them as paradoxical claims about evil. They in fact belong to the same flow of understanding that Arendt believes that we must go through in order to reach full understanding. Banality is not a disavowal of the general claims of radical evil but rather it raises the problem of incomprehensibility to a more fundamentally inscrutable level and that is through the mind of an actor and perpetrator without any comprehensible motive or reason for action.

Coming to Banality

Despite its brilliance in pointing out the inability of Kantian and Christian understandings of evil to fully comprehend the novel nature of totalitarianism, radical evil also left the door open to serious questions of her own revaluation of evil. Although, her description of radical evil as *novum*; an extreme form nihilism willing to give up its own survival for the sake of destroying the other, this revaluation of radical evil ineluctably drew her into a theological or metaphysical register. Not only did highlighting the anti-utilitarian nature of totalitarian practice bequeath upon radical evil a kind of irrationality usually reserved for the religious, but in pointing out the 'absolute' character of radical evil, Arendt's claim could easily be construed as implying that evil was something ontological and had become materialised by a race of monsters or community of devils. The more evidence she brought in order to show the novel nature of totalitarian evil, the more unattached to social and political life evil became and the more transcendental radical evil came to look. The challenge was to preserve the radical otherness of evil but avoid the scenario of seeing evil as some immutable force in the world as opposed to a set of choices (albeit incomprehensible choices).

Arendt was conscious of the problem of transcendentalising the actors and actions of perpetrators, even before she wrote *OT*. In an insightful correspondence, dated to 1946, with

her friend and former doctoral advisor Karl Jaspers, she had already asserted the major claim of *OT* as the incomprehensibility of totalitarian evil.

> The Nazi crimes, it seems to me, explode the limits of the law; and that is precisely what constitutes their monstrousness. For these crimes, no punishment is severe enough. It may well be essential to hang Göring, but it is totally inadequate. That is, this guilt in contrast to all criminal guilt, oversteps and shatters any and all legal systems.[32]

To such thinking, Jaspers replied that 'You say what the Nazi's did cannot be comprehended as "crime" - I'm not altogether comfortable with your view, because a guilt that goes beyond all criminal guilt inevitably takes on a streak of "greatness" – of satanic greatness –.'[33] Instead, he suggested we see the incomprehensible crimes of the Nazis in a completely different light. He adds that 'It seems to me we have to see these things in their total banality, in their prosaic triviality, because that is what truly characterizes them.'[34] Arendt admitted to Jaspar that 'in the way I've expressed this up to now I come dangerously close to that of "satanic greatness."[35] Arendt was opposed to applying such judgements to explain the behaviour of Nazi leadership. Nevertheless, her exchange with Jaspers was to draw fruit in her formulation of the banality of evil.

There is a temptation to draw a sharp distinction between Arendt's formulation of radical evil as representing something extraordinary and the banality of evil as something entirely ordinary. However, it would be misleading to conceive it in such binary terms, or indeed as the result of a revolution in her thought. Bernstein writes that 'the phenomenon that she identified as the banality of evil *presupposes* this understanding of radical evil.'[36] What this can be taken to mean is several things but most significant among them is that the banality of evil preserves

[32] Hannah Arendt, *Hannah Arendt Karl Jaspers Correspondence 1926-1969*, ed Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans Robert and Rita Kimber (London, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993) 54
[33] Ibid 62
[34] Ibid
[35] Ibid
[36] Bernstein, *Radical Evil* 218

the incomprehensibility of evil that she had been pointing out in *OT*. Arendt revaluated the belief that rational or utilitarian motives as the only explicable motives to perpetrate such actions was inadequate to comprehend the novel power politics of the camps. Similarly, the actions of Nazi's couldn't also be reduced to old evil like hate, power, land-grab, bloodlust or greed. Whilst these traditional vices were undoubtedly motives for some of wild beastly elements within the SA leadership, the anti-utilitarian character of the leaderships goals seem to rule this out as a possibility. To have feelings, hatred or resentment inside the camps also opened the door to other empathetic feelings such as guilt, compassion or remorse and this imperilled the entire operation of factory mass-killings.

Banality therefore represents another layer in the incomprehensibility of evil, by encountering the persons and comprehending the kinds of individuals who could be responsible for negating their private vices, or coldly excluding rational calculations to organise and implement such brutality. To possess the 'right' vices in order to commit such horrific deeds meant a diabolical being, to which Arendt was opposed, to possess rationality meant some connection to practical morality, but this would be an impediment to following orders that were against morality and against rationality, thus also imperilling goals of destruction. Therefore, banality grows out of this sense of incomprehensibility, and having to comprehend what kinds of person were willing to commit such deeds, given the diabolical person was excluded, and given that rationality was only needed to implement orders efficiently, the logical and even more incomprehensible answers was people like Eichmann. That is, people of ordinary intelligence, lacking moral integrity, but able to operate in cold indifference to outcomes or with discernible motive for or against the responsibilities placed upon them.

The incomprehensibility of motives outlined in *OT*, was developed in *EJ*, by the idea of a motiveless killer. Arendt is still moving within the space of incomprehensibility, albeit you might you say that now she is also comprehending evil, by looking at the perpetrators in

question, but at the same time opening up a new layer of incomprehensibility by denoting such radical-banal evil as being committed without the presence of motives entirely, and by the actions or ordinary individuals. Significantly, the ordinariness of banal perpetrators like Eichmann also brought out the question of how far traditional categories 'exploded' by totalitarianism could account for such perpetrators. The challenge of incomprehensibility was raised in relation to whether traditional juridical categories were adequate to punish the crimes in which the criminal failed to exhibit any real motive or intention. Indeed, the normality of Eichmann and other banal bureaucratic officials like him meant the courts had to come to terms with a 'new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani*, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.'[37] Arendt has no desire to abandon the concept of crime or criminal procedures but instead believed it was worth questioning the traditional relationship between the perpetrator and act that was united by intention or motivation.

Whilst this offered many prominent Nazis an excuse to plead ignorance in defending their actions, these bluffers aside, it brought out another facet of the novelty of totalitarian evil. Whilst the absence of motive and indeed the banality of evil seemed to pardon the perpetrators and even seemed to open up the horrific idea that they might be decent fellows beneath the murdering and the mass-killing. Arendt however, defended it by pointing out that evil still needed to be comprehended, regardless of the costs or the emotions it trampled upon. In a letter written to Gershom Scholem after the publication of *EJ* and in response to his critical review, she explained why she felt the need to use 'banality' to make this new evil comprehensible.

> It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is "thought-defying," as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots,

[37] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 276

> and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its "banality".[38]

The influence of her mentor Karl Jaspar is clearly noticeable in this new description of evil as 'banal.' However, we might also see the grains of this formulation of banality as not possessing depth, in the *HC*. For instance, this work treats the trial of Socrates as the harbinger of the devaluation of the world by assigning contemplative life (*vita contemplativia*) an ontological priority over the active life (*vita activia*) which wrongly identifies reality with appearances. We might understand this devaluation of appearances as also present in the translation of evil into possessing a 'reality' beneath the appearance of radical evil. In other words, the belief that there is some hidden satanic force or indeed perverted will behind the appearances of evil. Arendt's argument is that we don't need to speculate that beneath totalitarian evil or indeed beneath Eichmann there is depth or meaning. The nature of this evil is simply externalised action and that is all there is to it. This doesn't contradict the earlier assessment of how totalitarian evil was resolved to render humanity superfluous because where 'radical' and 'banal' evil overlap is they conceive totalitarian evil as essentially shallow despite the unthinkability of the former. An assembly line of lucifers would have simply been too inefficient and presumably would have too much fun in order to realise the goals of the final solution. Breaching the limits of the law or guilt relied on an army of shallow practioners committed to the obedient fulfilment of each task like makings the camps function or the train run on schedule. The wickedness of the results didn't need to be commensurable with any sense of wickedness in terms of motive or disposition gone into achieving these results.

[38] Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil*, 218

Eichmann Appears: The Idea of a Motiveless Perpetrator

Eichmann was kidnapped by members of the Israeli intelligence services on May 11, 1960, whilst living as a fugitive in Argentina. Several days after his kidnapping, he had been flown out of Argentina, in order to stand trial in Israel, for his role in the planning and execution of the final solution. Arendt attended most of the trial and her perceptions of the trial were serialised by *The New Yorker*, and published as *EJ* in 1963, and two years later into an expanded edition. Arendt had no difficulty in accepting the illegality of kidnapping Eichmann, this was justifiable because of his indictment at Nuremberg, on charges of crimes against humanity. To be clear, *EJ*, is not a philosophical or theoretical work on the problem of evil in the manner of Kant. It is primarily a social-historical narrative that includes Eichmann's emergence as a figure of significance within the Nazi party, a brief history of the final solution, the question German and Jewish culpability, and the novel legal questions the trial posed for understanding future atrocities.

Arendt's portrait of Eichmann as banal is intelligible in opposition to the Manichean image painted by the prosecution led by the prosecution and in particular attorney general Gideon Hausner who she lampoons continuously throughout *EJ*. In his opening statement, Hausner compared the deeds of Eichmann to Genghiz Khan, Ivan the terrible and Attila the Hun. This presented Eichmann as bloodthirsty tyrant born to murder and kill every Jew possible. Accordingly to Arendt 'the more grandiose Mr. Hausner's rhetoric became, the paler and more ghostlike became the figure in the glass booth, and no finger-wagging: "And there sits the monster responsible for all this," could shout him back to life.'[39] The monstrous otherness of Eichmann's character was pursued in Hausner's book on the trial where he described Eichmann as "a cunning flinthearted plotter, with a demonic personality."[40] For the prosecution the

[39] Arendt, *Eichmann* 8
[40] Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (New York, Harper Row 1966) 6

connections were simple: evil actions are presupposed by evil motivations which derive from a perverted monstrous personality.

What frustrated Arendt was the trial went about comprehending Eichmann in completely the wrong way. It had focused on understanding the character of Eichmann, which Arendt was in favour for, but the way it understood the character was counter-productive and self-serving, as it viewed Eichmann through the microcosm of someone irredeemably satanic. The trial was therefore serving the moral politics of the cold war (and placing Israel on the moral side of these politics) by dividing humanity into good and evil. With no depth or scrutiny of the perpetrator in question, the trial seemed more intent on promoting the national aims of the Israeli state than doing justice. The failure of properly comprehending the personality of Eichmann and making the trial about the perversity of Eichmann's character made the entire question of culpability for moral atrocities a foregone conclusion. During the initial statements of the trial, Hausner had exclaimed 'that there was only one man who had been concerned almost entirely with the Jews, whose business had been their destruction whose role in the establishment of the iniquitous regime had been limited to them. That was Adolf Eichmann.'[41] In bequeathing a 'satanic greatness' upon Eichmann, it made his demonic character as entirely responsible for the choices he made. Eichmann was in no position to claim ignorance of what was taking place, given his high-level involvement in the planning and implementation of the final solution. There was deliberate intent behind his actions, witnessed in his desire to see the final solution implemented and the remaining Jews sent to extermination camps, despite the manpower and resources needed for realising the final solution actually harming the war effort. It made Eichmann too intelligible, too rational and too comprehensible.

The image of Eichmann as 'brutish', 'feral', 'demonic', 'diabolical', 'bloodthirsty' and 'sadistic, was the understanding of evil Arendt was intent on avoiding. Arendt wrote that 'it

[41] Arendt, *Eichmann* 6

was essential that one take him seriously' and this meant that 'Despite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a "monster," but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was not a clown.'[42] The subtext of this remark comes from the view that evil doesn't possess depth but is something futile or lays waste to the world. Indeed, listening to Eichmann and the banality of his arguments or justifications for his crime brings out her deeper connection to Augustine. Like him she was unconvinced that evil had has satanic depth or an Immutable Manichean reality behind it, but was in fact reflected the mere appearance of depth. Therefore, lost amongst the rhetoric of the trial, keen on showing Eichmann as a perpetrator of depth, will, intention and belief was actual defendant born of 'flesh and blood' with a personal biography, his distinct traits and qualities and how they were utilised in the incendiary situation created by the Third Reich. The challenge presented by Eichmann wasn't explaining his actions through a projection of his character as something abnormal but rather the more difficult task of reconciling his depthless normality with his crimes so future atrocities could be avoided. Neiman points out that 'at every level, the Nazis produced more evil, with less malice, than civilisation had previously known.'[43] What Arendt was questioning was the very idea that the holocaust simply needed to pool the most evil personalities in human history.

Indeed, one of the issues brought forward by the trial was it failed to comprehend just how little use traditional legal categories of intent and motive were in making intelligible the 'unprecedented' crimes of the holocaust. For the prosecution they 'wanted to try the most abnormal monster the world had ever seen and, at the same time, try in him "many like him," even the "whole Nazi movement and anti-Semitism at large.'[44] Eichmann's actions were motivated by an antisemitic creed, and this shaped intentions and the ideological commitment to destroy Jews. The trouble was the court was less diligent in finding a robust relationship

[42] Ibid 54
[43] Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought* 271
[44] Arendt, *Eichmann* 276

between the evidence of his crimes and the prosecutions belief in his demonic or monstrous intent. Indeed, the examination of his character drew you back to his normality and the fact that the intention to kill or destroy could be shallow as well as monstrous. For Arendt, this was entirely the point of Eichmann's incomprehensibility that the trial was unable to come to terms with. The idea of not having a motive for evil action seemed to make such action more chilling, more inscrutable and allowed the unintelligibility of evil to remerge. Although Arendt felt it was both legally and morally necessary to punish Eichmann, she believed the unprecedented nature of the holocaust and the idea of a motiveless perpetrator who commits his or her crimes under the state's command demanded to be looked on as neither genocide nor a crime against the Jewish people. But rather a 'crime against humanity' and more specifically an 'administrative massacre'[45] which covers the conceivable scenario in which 'the automated economy of a not-too distant future men may be tempted to exterminate all those whose intelligence quotient is a below a certain level.'[46]

Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann as 'banal' and 'ordinary', as a new type of 'desk killer' did not convince everyone or indeed most. The criticisms that were directed at Arendt were both personal and towards the concept of banality itself. Many felt her criticisms of the culpability of the Jewish councils during the holocaust were unfair whilst to compound this she was seemingly extricating Eichmann of guilt. The tone of scepticism toward banality is best encapsulated by Gershom Scholem who in a letter to Arendt wrote that:

> I remain unconvinced by your thesis concerning the "banality of evil" – a thesis which, if your subtitle is to be believed, underlies your entire argument. This new thesis strikes me as a catchword: it does not impress me, certainly, as the profound analysis – an analysis such as you gave us so convincingly, in the service of a quite different, indeed contradictory thesis in your book on totalitarianism.[47]

[45] Ibid 288
[46] Ibid pp 288-89
[47] Bernstein, *Radical Evil* 217

Other criticism was not so measured and more towards her integrity as a Jewish women. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a distinction that Arendt's concept of the banality of evil is correct, even if Arendt is mistaken about Eichmann. The idea of evil as something that is motiveless and therefore absolutely cold, strikes one as fundamentally sound, and in fact is her most significant contribution to pointing out the incomprehensibility of evil whilst trying to comprehend evil. Arendt is not ruling out the monstrous or the satanic, even as they are utterly simplistic, but rather the nature and complexity of the holocaust needed different kinds of evil; *instrumental* i.e., power and greed; *absolute-radical* i.e., anti-utilitarian and self-destructive and *monstrous* i.e., to inflict useless suffering. Banality represents another layer, and a more incomprehensible layer of evil for that matter, but one that invites us to think that monstrous deeds are done without any obvious malice or wickedness. Crimes that are done without emotion in conception or their consequence. In this respects, it represents a growth or deepening of the basic idea of radical evil as it represents an evil that has robbed us of the categories to measure or categorise catastrophe.

Whether Arendt got Eichmann correct is more contentious. Eichmann also encouraged this perception of himself as an 'obedient official' in order to devalue his own role and exculpate himself of responsibility. Like other Nazi's caught after the war he stressed his own disposability. He stated that: 'If I had not been sitting there, someone else would have had to make the same decisions on the basis of the instructions, regulations, and orders of the higher ups.'[48] However, Eichmann was not stuck behind a desk through the duration of the Third Reich. He made numerous trips to Auschwitz, other killing sites and other German and Austrian cities. According to Cesarani 'Thanks to these outings Eichmann saw all that was necessary for the education of a *génocidaire*.'[49] This image of Eichmann as simply signing off

[48] David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London Vintage, 2004) 153
[49] Ibid

paperwork and gathering data and collating lists of Jewish names is not true. According to Cesarani 'the self-denying portrait Eichmann gave of himself while on trial is belied by evidence of his aptitude for power games within the Third Reich.'[50] Eichmann's devotion to Jewish suffering is found in the infamous transportation of Hungarian Jews in 1944. There were 750,000 Jews in Hungry in March 1944, and between April and July 1944 around 437,000 were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where three-quarters were murdered on arrival. Eichmann personally travelled to Hungary and was involved in the deportations. In Hungary he came into conflict with politicians and diplomats who wished to protect the last surviving Jews, however, Eichmann was already committed to their deportation.

Arendt and Augustine

Whilst her personal experience with totalitarianism and then the Eichmann trial undoubtedly shaped her formulation of radical and then the banal evil. In this section we want to go beneath the famous assertions of banality. Furthermore, we want to consider what is beneath the idea of a motiveless perpetrator and the structure of totalitarianism that enabled both radical and banal evil to become embedded in society. In this regard, there is something to be said of her long running interest with Augustine, whose own interrogations into the futility of evil and his opposition to binary understanding of good and evil resonated with Arendt. What I hope to show in this, and the final section is that Arendt's relationship with Augustine is quite profound and shapes her ontology of political action that seeks to resist evil as well the incomprehensibility and comprehensibility of evil. This Augustinian common thread shows that a powerful attempt to comprehend evil in both radical and banal variations from religious codifications ineluctably draws her towards the religious and some places resistance towards religion are difficult to overcome. Arendt's denotation of evil as 'thoughtlessness', 'defying' and the shallowness or normality of Eichmann is decidedly influenced by Augustine even as

[50] Ibid 361

the language is outside the traditional context of religion. Moreover, the Augustinian common thread can be noted through the notion of the will's habituation or *cupiditas* toward evil and Arendt's attempt to understand the human condition as defined by (political) action and action as fulfilling a deeper attachment to the world.

Arendt's interest in Augustine originates in her dissertation *Love and Saint Augustine*. Their common interest in the problem of evil has naturally invited comment over possible areas of agreement. It is conceivable that 'Augustine's understanding of evil as habituated *cupiditas* may thus have passed over the bridge of her 1929 dissertation to her own notorious analysis of Eichmann's evil as "banal."'[51] Understandably drawing Arendt into the circle of Christianity's most influential theologian is difficult for some Arendtean specialists who point to her disputes with religious authorities notwithstanding her complicated relationship with Judaism. Young-Bruehl doubts whether the importance of Augustine can be used to signify the shift of her analysis from the 'radical evil' of *OT* to the 'banality of evil' in *EJ*.

> The idea of radical evil evokes the Manichean of Gnostic doctrine that both the good and evil are primordial…When Hannah Arendt rejected this idea, she moved in the direction of the doctrine that has been the chief alternative in the Western tradition; evil is merely a privation of the good…But despite her admiration for the greatest of the ex-Manichees, Arendt was no theologian, not even an Augustinian one, and she explained the privative nature of evil in secular terms.[52]

Young-Bruehl's measured criticism fairly points out that it would be misleading to convert Arendt into a theological thinker, and therefore a proponent of the privation theory of evil. However, we must pay attention to how she believes the human condition has been altered by secular modernity, that has created the conditions for evil that is incomprehensible. Highlighting only her secularity, obscures her criticism of modernity and its role in creating an

[51] Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, Introduction: "New Beginnings" in Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* ed Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago, Chicago University Press 1996) 120

[52] Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, Yale University Press 1982) 369

existential void which allowed totalitarian style mass politics, and the evil that spewed out from it, to step in and give human action, otherwise detached from modern society a meaningful relationship to the world. Totalitarianism therefore filled the gulf of meaning that was traditionally provided by religion.

The mood of her dissertation by contrast is backed with 'religious overtones.'[53] To begin with, Arendt is particularly drawn to Augustine's notion of the will, and how it shapes our connection and disengagement from the 'world.' Implicit here is the fact that would become more prominent in Arendt's later political theory and especially in *OT*, is the role of the will in shaping human freedom, and therefore committed to or turning away from evil. A key part of Augustine's interpretation of being ensnared by sin and evil is the concept of *cupiditas* that means libidinal love that creates an irrepressible attachment to the world.

> Living in *cupiditas*, man belongs to the world and is estranged from himself. Augustine calls this worldliness in which the self gets lost "dispersion". By desiring and depending on things "outside my-self," that is, on the very things I am not, I lose the unity that holds me together by virtue of which I can say "I am."'[54]

Indeed, this misdirection of the self towards the materiality of the world, instead of the eternity of God, is made use of in *The City of God*. Augustine believes the true enemy of Rome was not the Christian faith, but the 'obsessive materialism and concern for temporal goods and gratification was in contrast to the virtues exhibited in the earlier Roman empire.'[55] The collapse of Rome arises from the wickedness that springs from unchecked *cupiditas*. This leads Augustine to contrast it to a notion of *caritas* that rests upon a true love of the world that originates in the love of God. The importance of *caritas* is it originates in true choice whereas the love of the world that underpins *cupiditas* is a form of sin habituated by desire that keeps us estranged from God's love.

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[53] Laurence Barthold "Towards an Ethics of Love: Arendt on the Will and St Augustine." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol 26, No. 6 (2000) 13
[54] Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 23
[55] David Grummet, Arendt Augustine and Evil, *Heythrop Journal*, Vol 41, No. 2 (2000) 157

This sense of attachment through habit is presented in Arendt, in the sense of how evil was normalised or habituated in society. To begin with, Arendt notes that the 'greatest difficulty this self-forgetfulness and complete denial of human existence raises for Augustine is that it makes the central Christian demand to love one's neighbour as oneself well-nigh impossible.'[56] We can therefore see how Arendt's study of Augustine could subsequently be put to use in the formulations of evil in *OT* and *EJ* respectively. From Augustine she develops how the existence of evil cannot be parsed away from the world habituated by sinfulness and evil. Where Arendt differs from Augustine is her fundamental ontological focus is political, and is therefore not determined by the forgetfulness of love, God and eternity as the precondition for human evil. For Arendt the 'political' becomes the *higher realm of existence* which Augustine identified with eternity, *caritas* and neighbourly love. It is the 'political' which therefore transcends our particular identities and indeed those dispositions that are so habituated and which cause us to attach ourselves to the self-annihilating search for material reward and not true political action. It is the 'political' where we come closest to replicating the injunction of neighbourly love that guards most powerfully from great evils.

To understand Arendt's formulation of the political we must come at it from her perspective of 'worldlessness' understood as thought which turns away from human/political action (*vita activia*) crystallised by the 'public realm' where people come to resolve issues of meaning and existence. In the *HC* Arendt uses the term *vita activia* by which she means 'human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something'[57] to stand for three fundamental kinds of human activities that constitute the world. These are 'labor' or biological and self-preservation, 'work' that produces an object and finally 'action' which discloses a person's identity. Arendt conveys through *vita activia* the idea of humans engaging the world as creators, best

[56] Hannah Arendt, *Love and Augustine*, 30
[57] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22

represented as the 'public realm' instituted by the Greek *polis* as a space 'where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were.'[58] The ideal of the public realm is to create an intersubjective "common world" used to stave off the sense of 'worldlessness.' It is the absence of a 'public realm' in 1930's German society that allowed evil to become *habituated* under the Nazi regime and this a result of the transformation of the political inside of modernity.

The habituation of evil is intelligible because modernity is fundamentally driven by resentment of finitude and the outcome of this is the birth of *Homo Faber*, a being that asserts themselves against those limits not through action but through 'fabrication' and 'making.' The distinction is thin but for Arendt the difference between making and acting is that modernity produces the conviction that mans 'higher capacities depend on making.'[59] Therefore what binds modernity together is the belief that *action serves the end of making* whether that is making money, machines or war. Therefore, the millions of people who flocked to totalitarian movements in the 1920's and 1930's did so because they had no conceptions of themselves as political actors in the real sense of political identities that were contingently created. But rather their self-understanding as actors came from what they could be convinced they were making, which in the case of Soviet totalitarianism was they were *making* a classless society or in the case of the Nazi totalitarianism they were *re-making* human nature. In both forms of totalitarianism, *acting* was pitted beneath *making*. The essence of totalitarianism was it flowed from bourgeois society not against it. Arendt writes 'these deeds were not committed by outlaws, monsters, or raving sadists, but by the most respected members of respectable society'.[60] All it took was convincing citizens that because they possessed laws, rules and rights there was legal continuity to their politics.

[58] Ibid 41
[59] Ibid 228
[60] Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement* ed Jerome Kohn (New York, Schocken 2003) pp 42-3

After the trial Arendt was intent on explaining the transformation of German society that caused the collapse morality and judgement. Understanding what went wrong in German society adheres in its general contours to her earlier ideas expressed in her dissertation on Augustine. We highlighted the importance of *cupiditas* and the habitual alignment to the world which leads people astray from God and pushes them into a life of sin and evil. Arendt had written that the 'inclination to sin springs more from habit than from passion itself, because the world man has founded in covetousness is consolidated in habit.' [61] The influence of Augustine stands over Arendt, through her claim that the representation of 'conventionality' and 'normality' meant millions of Germans switched off their moral beliefs because they were convinced that the possession of legal rules had made it morally justifiable, to obey the state and conform to social norms. This led to a 'morality collapsed into a set of mores – manners, customs, conventions to be changed at will – not with criminal but with ordinary people, who, as long as moral standards were socially accepted, never dreamt of doubting what they had been taught to believe in.'[62] Arendt's point can be understood as morality had turned into a set of formal rules unable to recognise violence or suffering but done habitually for the sake of preserving a sense of social normality and not love for the world and definitely not love for the neighbour. Arendt compares it to a set of conventions as exchangeable as 'table manners.'[63] Therefore, people were protected from the dangers of thinking and examining moral and political affairs because they were convinced that the possession of legal rules had made it morally justifiable to go along with obeying state and society. In this manner, large swathes of German society had become detached from the moral crisis and the everyday horrors taking place before them, by virtue of the fact that people were employed, went on holidays, public

[61] Hannah Arendt, *Love and St Augustine* 83
[62] Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement* 54
[63] Ibid 42

services remained functional and the (totalitarian) government was seemingly enforcing constitutional law.

What reinforced this arrangement was the legal order of the Third Reich had placed right and wrong under the (criminal) morality of the Führer. Those who persecuted could do so under the pretence of constitutional normality, because the actions were done according to the 'will of the Führer' or 'words of the Führer.' This characterisation of morality meant that evil could be done without many Germans ever having to think too deeply about the nature of their actions. Like Eichmann they were "law abiding citizens" because institutional continuity and habit had convinced them of this. The good conscience of ordinary Germans had become co-opted by the habit of seeing authority working 'normally.' For Arendt this is summed up in the loss of the greatest vice that propels person to evil.

> Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it – the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbours go off to their doom (for the Jews were transported to their doom they knew, of course, even though many of them may not have known the gruesome details), and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them. But, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation.[64]

What is crucial to understanding the shift introduced by totalitarian evil was that morality became a matter of following social rules done by habit rather than real freedom or spontaneous reflection or keen moral judgement. The content of the rules was less important in comparison to the existence of rules and the habit of following them. For Arendt, the most startling evidence for this new arrangement was just how easily German society came to reverse moral commandments and see 'Thou shalt kill' and 'Thou shalt lie' as justifiable propositions.[65] Evil had become a matter of habit and routine as opposed to something that was subverting society.

[64] Arendt, *Eichmann* 150
[65] Ibid 150

In this context, Eichmann seemed to float in the ether; able to obey orders but seemingly unable to connect the content of these orders, rules or commands i.e., the transportation of millions of people and the freightage of gas, to a stable principle of moral judgement.

> He functioned in the role of prominent war criminal as well as he had under the Nazi regime; he had not the slightest difficulty in accepting an entirely different set of rules. He knew that what he had once considered his duty was now called a crime, and he accepted this new code of judgement as though it were nothing but another language rule.[66]

Arendt's response to resisting the habituation of evil is a conception of the political that is orientated by plurality, and 'specifically *the* condition- not only the condition *sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*-of all political life'[67] and secondly natality as the instinctive human desire to be spontaneous thus perpetually creates new political ideas, conversations, debates and goals which creates the grounds for a continuous revival of the political. The constant re-invention is understood as unsettling the habituation of political violence definitive of totalitarian political culture. We may also recognise that it identifies the problem of the political in close proximity with Augustine's notion of *cupiditas* by dint of political existence becoming habituated by evil through its 'forgetfulness' of the political. For Augustine, we are habituated by sin not because we 'forget' the political but because we 'forget' to love God. It reveals the continuities between Arendt and Augustine and the extent to which the 'political' begets a value that is within and beyond the world.

Banality as Privation

The other side of the thread uniting Arendt and Augustine is the commensurability between the privation theory of evil and the banality of evil. On the face of it banality seems to resist being reduced to privation and there are important differences to consider. Not least that Arendt was critical of Platonic metaphysics and traditional ontology that Augustine took inspiration from

[66] Arendt, *Responsibility* 159
[67] Arendt, *The Human Condition* 7

and applied to the intelligibility of evil as something in a state of losing reality and corruption. Yet, whilst not downplaying these differences, there is a common resistance of reducing evil to something 'demonic' or the otherwise Manichean duality of good and evil. Furthermore, this common thread is revived in Arendt's ontological commitment to moral freedom that she shares with Augustine. To be clear, Arendt doesn't see freedom as good and it's opposite i.e., non-freedom as some kind of fixed ontological condition of evil. Rather, and this is where her reliance on a privation ontology is noticeable, banality means the loss of the good that freedom affirms i.e., action, thinking, responsibility and autonomy.

Therefore, to comprehend evil, meant facing it, not looking for psychological factors or metaphysical causes, but confronting it phenomenologically. To this, Eichmann's evil was pure 'surface' 'texture' and 'appearance' marked by neither depth nor mystery. It is in this context that we can make sense of the 'banality' of evil as a contribution to an Augustinian or privation understanding of evil, but channelled through her own conceptualisations. One example of this appropriation of Augustine is through her central notion of 'thoughtlessness', which Arendt identifies as the defining trait of Eichmann, but also a feature of modern evil in general. The essence of this view is contained in a short rhythmic passage at the end of the work, where she states: "the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught is – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*."[68] Arendt's contribution of 'thoughtlessness' also raises the question of personal responsibility for evil and the adequacy of juridical categories to account for actions under obedience. The other side of this appropriation of Augustine is in the ordinariness' or 'shallowness' of the perpetrator. More specifically the sense of shallowness presents us with an Augustinian lack or absence of quality, and in the context of Eichmann, it is the absence or a lack of a defining motive that distinguishes Eichmann. To be clear, neither 'thoughtlessness' or the 'shallowness' of evil are strictly

[68] Arendt, *Eichmann* 252

theological ideas, but they present a basic sense of what privations tries to convey, and that is evil is without great design or meaning. Moreover, that despite Arendt's sincere attempt to make evil comprehensible, the notion of evil still puts up certain resistance and is compelled toward a theological register.

I. Thoughtlessness

One of the challenges presented by Eichmann and other bureaucratic killers was it definitely did also explode and expose the usefulness of traditional legal categories. Arendt's point on comprehending when the tools or yardstick to comprehend them are no longer adequate is represented in the issue of personal responsibility for crime. For many perpetrators who performed their tasks as part of 'cogs' in a system, even if that system was perpetrating mass murder, the actual line between obedience, personal responsibility, professional agnosticism and being a father was simple and straightforward. They performed the duties with perfunctory rigour, regardless of the consequences of their actions. Nevertheless, the self-understanding of being a functionary and committed to political and legal structures of the state presented one of the most profound challenges and that is of how the question of personal responsibility was to be understood. If people simply felt they were rule-bound to follow orders, the alternative to not following was to break the law, even if that meant saving lives, and become criminals. This required some rethinking of the meaning of personal responsibility and whether conventional notions of responsibility through free choice was really something explain what happened in 1930's Germany. Indeed, after the holocaust the question of personal responsibility and moral autonomy is raised repeatedly, whether in the experiments of Milgram or Levinas, both in their different ways wanting to reframe responsibility away from individualism and in the case of Levinas something that is asymmetrical and even pre-emptive.

If the question of personal responsibility is made unintelligible thanks to bureaucratic killings, then Arendt does introduce a means to think of how perpetrators had come to think of

themselves as 'cogs' even if this was something she believed didn't absolve a person from the choices they made and therefore guilt and responsibility. Arendt's main concern is to stress the fundamental relationship between Eichmann's banality and the faculty of thought to make responsibility comprehensible. In one of the most memorable passages of *EJ* she highlights the new phenomenon of 'thoughtlessness' exemplified by Eichmann.

> Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III "to prove a villain." Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He *merely*, to put the matter colloquially *never realised what he was doing*.[69] Eichmann was not repugnant; he was just mediocre and above all "banal". What defined him was "sheer thoughtlessness"-something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period.[70]

The notion of thoughtlessness is by itself quite obscure. It conjures everything from dystopian cold war experiments in mind control to the contemporary fascination with zombies. Arendt admits that the question of conscience is troublesome[71] and this is because 'it did its work within odd limits.'[72] For instance, Eichmann had more difficulty in accepting German Jews being killed than the mass executions of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the East.[73] Nevertheless 'thoughtlessness' is essential to reformulating personal responsibility in society where morality has collapsed or has become habituated to violence.

The problem that dominated the question of personal responsibility in the face of thoughtlessness was that morality in German society had collapsed. What totalitarianism was successful at, was subverting pre-existing rules by another set of rules that relied on obedience to orders, moral rules and customs as opposed to sheer terror. German society had become habituated to violence through the thoughtless implementation of rules and orders. This was

[69] Ibid 287
[70] Ibid pp 287-88
[71] Ibid 97
[72] Ibid 95
[73] Ibid 96

enough as it provided a measure to keep one's conscience clean and not having to maul over one's actions. Traditional categories of crime and responsibility were unable to account of this dimension of totalitarianism that created this perception of normality which allowed people to continue with their lives by offering so little resistance.

Illustrative of this habituation of violence was by the *Füherprinzip*, or leader principle, meaning 'that during the Third Reich "Führer's words had the force of the law" *Fuhrerworte haben Gesetzeskraft*).'[74] Eichmann's opposition to the 'moderate wing' that attempted to sabotage the Führer's commandment were rationalised on the basis that Hitler's, orders need not be in the form of writing and instead, his verbal pronouncement also carried the authority of the law. In this novel 'legal' reality, orders contrary to those given by the Führer were therefore also to be treated like criminal orders because 'the new law of the land, based on the Führer's order; whatever he did he did as far as he could see, as a law-abiding citizen.'[75] Indeed this self-image as law-abiding citizen was pushed to creative lengths when Eichmann defended his obedience by claiming his behaviour was commensurable with the precepts of Kantian moral philosophy. Though where Kant encourages human beings to abandon moral and reflective judgement is unclear.

Nevertheless, Eichmann went onto to explain that the source of his actions 'were the same as the legislator or the law of the land'-or, in Hans Frank's formulation of the "categorical imperative in the Third Reich," which Eichmann might have known: "act in such a way that the Fuhrer, if he knew your action, would approve it."[76] If we take Eichmann at face value, it was the rules of the situation that determined the choices he made and his subsequent actions. It is not an exaggeration to say that Eichmann imagined himself as a soldier, who was under duress, and therefore had to make impossible choices. Eichmann had little alternative options,

[74] Ibid 148
[75] Ibid 135
[76] Ibid

and with time constraints weighing heavily upon him, there was no opportunity to think too hard about the opposition between duty with conscience. The evil inflicted by Eichmann was not the result of his autonomous choices but his obedience to the rules which accepted as if one would accept another language game.

This naturally falls into the trap of excusing Eichmann from taking moral responsibility for his own decisions. It shouldn't but it highlights the difficulty of discerning personal responsibility in a situation where the moral culture is in crisis and this crisis is masked by political power and the possession of legal and political rules. It also highlights the difficulty of traditional understandings of personal responsibility in such novel political conditions. Arendt's aim is not to illicit sympathy for Eichmann but remind us that if we are to comprehend Eichmann's guilt, we are going to have to rethink guilt and culpability and in particular the situations in which thoughtlessness arises. It is obviously incorrect to claim that Eichmann of other ordinary perpetrators like him could be indoctrinated to the point of thoughtlessness. Eichmann's involvement in the forced expulsion of Jews and their transportation meant that he possessed enough information to be cognisant of what was happening.

I don't think this is the aim of Arendt but rather it's a deepening of the problem of comprehensibility she raises in relation to totalitarianism. If the actions of perpetrators don't fit the categories of rational behaviour i.e., as self-interest, utilitarian or even sadistic, then it's pointless applying traditional and rational categories of responsibility on such actions. This goes back to the hard task of creating new categories to comprehending the novelty of totalitarian evil. For Arendt, the trial had got bogged down on contemplating Eichmann's moral vices and the antisemitism of German society, relinquishing the serous task of thinking of individual guilt or moral responsibility for crimes that exceed pre-existing categories.

II Shallowness of the Perpetrator

In the *OT*, Arendt drew on the fact that discerning the motives or intentions for the violence in the camps was incomprehensible because they could be excluded from self-interest and were outside any means-end calculus that we traditionally use to understand human behaviour. Arendt was not denying that many Jews were eliminated on account of their racial differences, but this was never the real motive behind the holocaust, which was beyond comprehension altogether. In coming to Eichmann, she had gone deeper into the question of motivation and concluded more frighteningly the possibility that clear or ideological motives were absent entirely. Eichmann struck her as entirely shallow; disinterested or aloof to grand scenarios of creating a political utopia of racially pure-blooded Teutons.

Arendt's emphasis on evil action as surface or exteriority threw into doubt traditional attempts to conjugate malicious intent or motivation to evil actions. The moral psychology advanced by Kant and so enriched by Nietzsche and Freund in the coming century was completely rendered meaningless by evil that was free of *ressentiment*, aggression or some deliberate sadistic desire to inflict meaningless suffering. Again, in continuity with claims made in *OT*, and the earlier essay on comprehension, Arendt was going deeper into the incomprehensibility of evil and raising the possibility of whether prevailing intellectual categories were up to the task of really comprehending evil. Indeed, the modern attempt to understand evil is overwhelmingly reliant on uncovering intention behind a crime in order to punish a perpetrator. Arendt writes.

> Foremost among the larger issues at stake in the Eichmann trial was the assumption current in all modern legal systems that intent to do wrong is necessary for the commission of a crime. On nothing, perhaps has civilised jurisprudence prided itself more than on his taking into account of the subjective factor. Where this intent is absent, where, for whatever reasons of moral insanity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed.[77]

[77] Arendt, *Eichmann* 277

What the prosecution and trial wanted to show was Eichmann's actions were motivated by a credo of antisemitism, meaning the final solution was the ultimate result of these intentions and the ideological commitment to destroy Jews. On the face of it, Arendt seemed to be mistaken in her assessment that Eichmann was a motiveless perpetrator, considering Eichmann personally intervened to make sure the last surviving community of Jews in Hungary were rounded and sent off to the extermination camps. The role of intent in determining Eichmann's actions is evident. He knew what he was doing and also knew the consequence of his interventions would result in the death of thousands of Jews.

Arendt, however, wants to shake us out of these common-sense intuitions about why evil is committed or that beneath every cruel action there must be a demonic character with a single motive to kill. The trial had sleepwalked into such assumptions because they believed they were about 'try the most abnormal monster the world had ever seen'[78] and therefore were less diligent in was finding a robust relationship between intention and the nature of the crime which Arendt believed should really be understood as an 'administrative massacre' achieved through the thoughtlessness of political decision-makers. Eichmann was hateful but had enough awareness to know that allowing hatred to rule him was a psychological and economic cost to the goal of the final solution. If there were motives in Eichmann, they were shallow like having his credibility affirmed before a superior or rising through the ranks of the bureaucracy. Critics of Arendt will find this as unnecessary hair-splitting and as apologising for the crimes of an appalling human being. her more salient point is the folly of believing that the monstrosity of the crime coincides with some measure of psychological depth. Intentions are as likely to be shallow as they are to be full of hate. In doing this she was alerting us to troubling reality of modern evil that quite ordinary people were capable of inflicting such horrific crimes without any remorse.

[78] Arendt, *Eichmann* 276

Whether Eichmann was quite as ordinary as Arendt believed is clouded by his actions in Hungary. It is more important to come to terms with how Eichmann was able to justify his actions and convince himself that his actions were done entirely with good conscience. We have highlighted the importance of thinking and the sense of thoughtlessness that allowed him to remain obedient to language rules or clichés. One of the preoccupations of Arendt towards the latter end of her intellectual career was developing a theory of judgement. Her interest in judgement had been stirred by the unprecedented and incomprehensible nature of political evil committed by totalitarian regimes that had shown up the inadequacy of traditional categories of moral action or ethical responsibility. The question of moral judgement was made all the more mystifying through the banal figure of Eichmann. In her essay 'Thinking and Moral considerations', she had posed the question 'Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent upon our faculty of thought?' of thought?'[79]A systematic theory of judgement could illuminate the rupture between thinking and action or thinking and evil she had noticed in Eichmann and make human beings take a more critical stance towards violence and suffering becoming habituated in society.

To be clear most of Arendt's reflections on judgment were never discussed in a systematic manner. There was meant to be a substantial contribution on judgment as the final volume in *The Life of Mind*, before her untimely death. Her writings on judgement comes from the aforementioned essay and her lectures on Kant's political philosophy. In this regard we might consider her indebtedness to Kant and speculate that the absence of judgement in Eichmann is defined by a complete lack of moral integrity that allowed him to divorce himself from personal responsibility. Eichmann lacked any central moral beliefs that would orientate his moral actions and judgements. In other words, his motiveless personality is down to the absence of a *Gesinuung,* something that Kant believed was universal. The absence of a moral character

[79] Arendt, *Responsibility*, 160

meant he never reflected on his moral choices or judged them from the perspective of his victims. His actions were atomistic and unconnected in any meaningful way to some moral law, value or belief, but instead a set of disconnected actions that were justified by his professional rank and the fact that he was possessed with authority to enact state commandments. His shallowness was down to the absence of depth to his personality, meaning that he couldn't really reflect on his judgements or connect his actions to consequences. This shallowness meant he never felt any liability or guilt if any breaches did occur.

Arendt refers to 1932 as the 'turning point of his life.'[80] It was the year Eichmann joined the Nazi party and entered the SS. However, none of this was done out of any deep conviction. Arendt notes that he 'had no desire and less desire to be properly informed, he not even know the party program, he never read *Mein Kampf*.'[81] The rootless Eichmann latched onto the moment and to rose within the ranks of the Nazi party as an 'expert' on Jewish affairs in the mid 1930's. This coincided with the growing persecution of Jews through the Nuremberg Laws (1935) and the *Kristallnacht* (1938). There was no depth to his knowledge of Jewish affairs, 'aside from a smattering of Hebrew, which enabled him to read haltingly a Yiddish newspaper.'[82] It supported the deception that he knew what he was talking about, and this pushed him through the ranks of the party.

His shallowness is made more hideous by his desire to appear as an innocent victim. During the trial, Eichmann claimed that 'one of the few advantages that fate has bestowed upon me is to speak the truth.'[83] It is his willingness to lie that is compelling in judging his evil as banal. He observed so much misery and took an active part in making sure it arrived at its destination and subsequently evaded his own participation and culpability. The possession of political authority and the possession of legal authority saved his conscience from the horrible truth of

[80] Arendt, *Eichmann*, 31
[81] Ibid 33
[82] Ibid 41
[83] Cesarani, *Eichmann* 288

having to judge the evil he was routinely performing. Such an explanation, in which the failure to judge is connected to a deep shallowness of the perpetrator, what we have called the absence of moral integrity also excuses Eichmann from guilt and responsibility. However, this was never Arendt preference, she dismissed the 'cog' theory that was used in Nuremberg and repeated that Eichmann was rightly guilty for the crimes he perpetrated and correctly held responsible for his crimes. What bothered and terrified Arendt was the possibility that evil could be so destructive yet be in complete isolation from thinking and judgement. Moreover, it afflicted both the non-educated and more worryingly educated sectors of society and politics. She never found final answer to this but alerted to us the perversity of evil and that this perversity doesn't need to be expressed in something demonic or something sophisticated but rather something simple as not reflecting, paying attention or exercising judgement when something horrific happens. What is most disturbing about banality is that in reminding us of evil's normality we are forced to confront its sheer wilfulness and intransigence. In alerting us to its normality we are pushed to surrender to its incomprehensibility.

After Banality

The aim of this chapter has been to present Arendt's interpretation of evil. This interpretation has traditionally been distinguished into 'radical' and 'banal' of evil. What we argued was that although these present quite different understanding of evil there is an underlying continuity between these ideas, and this creates a double challenge. Firstly, trying to comprehend the incomprehensibility of evil, and secondly, trying to comprehend the incomprehensibility of evil when the traditional categories no longer are intelligible to make sense of this novel and incomprehensible evil. Arendt's use of banality represents a deepening of radical evil as opposed to an abandonment. In *OT*, the challenge is how to make sense of evil action that fails to conform to rationality, self-interest, sadism and even meaningless suffering but destruction and destruction at the cost of self-destruction. In *EJ*, the challenge is how to comprehend this

destructive side of evil when it is without reason, intention or motive. The problematic raised by Arendt draws her work into the incomprehensible, inscrutable and unintelligible side of evil. Her diagnosis is that to begin comprehending evil we must rethink our notions of motive, intention, responsibility, crime, guilt, judgement. To begin the task of comprehension we must recognise that we cannot comprehend but still we must endeavour to comprehend and not leave the world as meaningless as totalitarianism threatens to.

The continuity between radical evil and the banality of evil is brought together by Arendt's rich appropriation of Augustine. Like the great theologian, there is an Augustinian resistance to reduce evil to something 'demonic' or otherwise to a Manichean duality of good and evil, even though she admitted to her mentor Karl Jaspers of coming close to ontologising evil into some kind of 'satanic greatness.' Arendt's connection to Augustine should not interest us merely on the basis of our concern with Arendt exegesis. Rather, what her admiration for Augustine shows is a powerful attempt to disentangle evil from a religious or metaphysical understanding is one that is difficult to overcome. The concept of evil resists intelligibility within an exclusively religious or secular frame. This seeps into her assessment that evil understood as banal was entirely surface and lacking profundity. A point that echoes Augustine's despair in the *Confessions* that the fall into evil is essentially meaningless. We also noted that the connection with Augustine presents itself in Arendt trying to explain what happened to social morality during 1930's Germany, through the notion of *cupuditas* and society essentially becoming habituated to evil. There is of course a need to be cautious and not draw too much continuity between Arendt, Augustine and privation, given her fundamental ontology valorises 'freedom', 'agency', 'spontaneity' and thoughtlessness in a manner that is not entirely commensurable with the Christian culture. For Arendt the challenge is to make incomprehensible evil, comprehensible, and to ensure stupidity never becomes culpable for such horror.

Conclusion

This thesis is an attempt to make sense and come to terms with the appeal to and appeal of evil in our supposedly secular age. People appeal to evil for a variety of reasons, that can include but is obviously not limited to, something supernatural i.e., like an evil force or power in world, or alternatively, some profound act or event that provokes a sense of incomprehensibility towards suffering or even something that is utterly banal. Despite what Amelie Rorty correctly described as the 'many faces of evil,'[1] in common parlance this face is often reduced to a singular one, that is understood through the category of religion (but can be extended to include simple codewords for religion like 'folkish', 'spiritual', 'superstition', 'mythological' or 'incomprehensible'). What we have shown in this thesis is the reduction of evil to the religious (or more generally the supernatural) has created an obstacle to understanding, rather than brought anything like clarity to the concept of evil, and this is because evil resists being pigeon-holed into an exclusively religious understanding and for that matter into an exclusively secular understanding. Indeed, what we have highlighted and illustrated throughout this thesis is the binary of religion and the secular is in fact quite problematic, and to take this binary as 'natural' or 'real' often obscures their imbricated and historically contingent character. Therefore, to disentangle the notion of evil in order to show its essentially religious or secular variations will put up resistance that are difficult to overcome. Furthermore more, both religious and secular conceptualisations are needed to comprehend evil that often escapes comprehension.

What happens to evil in a secular age? Can we indeed make sense of evil in a secular age? To make progress with this question, the thesis moved through the discourses of evil from antiquity, *via* the Middle Ages and into modernity. What this engagement with the intellectual history of evil through Greco-Christianity into secular Europe showed is that there is no

[1] See Amelie Rorty, *The Many Faces of Evil*: *Historical Perspectives* (New York, Routledge 2001)

singular or unifying conception of evil that is either 'religious' or 'philosophical', 'superstitious' or 'secular.' The story of what happens to evil is rather a story of the significant intellectual transformations of the European understanding of evil that is accompanied by a strongly secularising movement taking place within a predominantly and profoundly Christian culture – taking place *because* of it and not simply *against* it.

The thesis investigated first, the Christian privation theory of evil elaborated by Augustine, focusing on how evil is conceived in relation to the form/matter distinction that he inherited from Platonic philosophy. We noted that the introduction of the Christian God also created the seeds for the potential overcoming of the form/matter distinction, that had previously provided a robust intelligibility to the concept of evil. Subsequently, in the early modern, reformation period, the form/matter distinction is problematised thanks to the contribution of nominalism that helped to undermine the basic structure of medieval Christianity. The central pillars of reformation thought, *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*, also opened the floodgates to greater hermeneutical freedom with respect to the meaning of human action and this created a more pluralised understanding of evil, and therefore more questions over the intelligibility and unintelligibility of evil. Finally, our investigation arrived into the modern period, which examined efforts to re-found the European discourse of evil. The basic structure of intelligibility, once provided by the form/matter distinction and shattered by the reformation achieves stability, once again through the complete revaluation of the meaning of religion and the secular, in comparison to their medieval understanding. The basic trajectory has been one in which evil is intelligible through the differentiation of religion and the secular, and, more specifically, these categories set the basic framework for evil to be examined, investigated and conceptualised through a radically non-religious treatment of evil, either through the elimination of evil or through its affective reduction to an exclusive secular (natural and anthropocentric) referent.

The increasingly secular character of Europe's contemporary culture encourages an expectation that evil can be comprehended in exclusively human (principally psychological or natural) terms. The thesis moved into the contemporary context where the question of evil has returned, prompted by the resurgence of religion, whose non-withering of which also marks something of an identity crisis in the philosophy of secularism, and the narratives of secularisation undergirding the latter. However, we raised serious misgivings concerning the contemporary attempt to "disenchant" and to radically secularise evil further, highlighting that secular conceptualisations of evil are dependent on a historical construction of religion (as supernatural, violent, irrational, incomprehensible and paradoxically non-political) that ironically, led to 'religious violence' being conceived as the very paradigm of evil when it is conceived in a supposedly secular way. The most relevant 'example' of this was the different evaluations placed upon 'religious' violence and terrorism as compared to secular violence, evaluations that assert a simple binary division of religion and the secular where in fact there is a deep historical entanglement and a mutually reciprocal relationship. What we see is that a (supposedly) purely secular conceptualisation of evil ineluctably draws upon a religious register to make sense of the 'unthinkable', 'unimaginable' vicissitudes of meaningless suffering and intentional self-destruction.

The conceptual incoherence of contemporary secular conceptualisations of evil forced us to step back from these debates. The thesis then returned to the understanding of evil developed in the thought of Kant and Arendt. Making use of Taylor's notion of 'cross-pressures' we looked at thinkers as not operating within either an exclusively religious or exclusively secular perspective. These cross-pressures present themselves in Kant and Arendt, respectively, in the form of secular naturalism and political totalitarianism, against more comprehensive sense of moral and political existence. What we find in the thought of evil developed by Kant and Arendt, as radical and banality respectively, is that the theological and religious does not simply

disappear, that the effort to shed light on the incomprehensible nature of suffering caused by self-interested, self-destructive or motiveless perpetrators cannot be completed in an exclusively secular way. In doing so, the thesis suggested that dividing our understanding of the world into distinct "religious" and "secular" dimensions not only prevents us from coming to terms with our understanding of evil, but ultimately prevents us from coming to terms with our time as a supposedly secular age.

II

Let's take stock and highlight in more detail some of the key claims running through this thesis on the historical and philosophical discourse of evil. In closing I want to highlight five inter-connected ideas that strike me as central to further studies of evil in a secular age.

i.

Evil is a complex and contested historical discourse that has (and will continue) to undergo transformations and evolutions in the future. Although we have focused on just a sample of texts that belong to that history (and we regret having to miss out Irenaeus, Aquinas, Leibniz, Rosseau, Schelling, Nietzsche and Levinas to name only a few), nevertheless, from the discourses discussed, it becomes clear that there is no single uniting essence running through the European discourse of evil. Evil has been identified with the material (Manicheans), as the privation of the good within the material world (Augustine), as the absence of virtue through the immorality of the seven deadly sins (Medieval Catholicism), as a radical sense of sinfulness (Luther), as a supreme evil maxim that constitutes one's disposition (Kant) and as the absence of motivation (Arendt). It also needs to be considered that our focus has been exclusively on the intellectual culture of Christian and secular Europe. If we were to include a different but similarly broad cultural space like the Islamic world (if there is such thing as a singular object) then it would be quite natural to assume that the discourse overall will be marked by even greater variation and plurality.

With this history in view, I remain fundamentally sceptical about the project of developing an exclusively secular concept of evil. There is perhaps something admirable in trying to develop a concept of evil that is sufficiently general enough and that can account for the sadistic perpetrator and the banal operator. It is hoped by secularists that a concept of evil will be comprehensive and complete enough so that it can tell us what evil is, so that we explain what is evil, without simply adding more adjectives like 'very' or 'extreme.' In other words, evil will be as intelligible and self-standing as any other moral concept (that is if we think concepts like justice, ethics or the good can actually be made perfectly intelligible). But secular concepts of evil are not only historically naïve, but they also rely on profoundly questionable assumptions about religion itself (as mere superstition or anti-scientific delusion). I am not suggesting that a satisfactory conception of evil will or should or must be religious, but I am convinced that such an impoverished conception of religion will only produce an equally impoverished conception of evil.

I also think that a satisfactory conception of evil has to be an open-ended and evolving, not something given once and for all, and independent of all future experience. An analysis that may appear to do a good job in capturing evil acts or events that have happened and drawing out their general features by making analogies between them or other such events, is likely nevertheless to lose traction in new and unanticipated contexts. In this regard, the examples of Kant and Arendt utilised in this thesis are quite instructive of how the discourse is and must remain open and evolving. First of all, there is a similar problematic that unites Kant and Arendt's investigations into evil and that is how ordinary people abandon morality and perpetuate horrific actions. Their investigations are also responses to their respective context, in the case of Kant, the growth of revolutionary and even nihilistic violence, and for Arendt the incomprehensible violence of totalitarianism. For Kant, radical evil emerges as a response to the new evil prompted by the revolution and the terror that followed it. By contrast, Arendt

initially looked at Kant's concept of radical evil and considered the very idea of self-interest at its heart as unable to unlock the sheer incomprehensibility of totalitarian evil. She reformulated radical evil into the incomprehensible desire to self-destruct, to wipe out freedom and human nature itself. Arendt's a conception of evil was subsequently revised to include actions that are not monstrously willed against one's self-interest but were entirely lacking a monstrous element and were enacted by motiveless and thoughtless operators. The overriding point is the need to keep a concept of evil that does not claim to be able to anticipate what the future shape of evil, what the shape of a world with evil, will or must be. Evil cannot be tamed in that way.

Therefore, we need to be cautious about accepting a concept of evil or theory of evil that purports some universal or transhistorical force (which I believe a secular concept of evil is seeking). The world is filled with old fashioned evil but also newer threats to human existence. Most of the planet has just lived through a life-altering global pandemic responsible for millions of deaths. The next catastrophe on the horizon is the looming crisis of climate change and the need for rethinking how we live and how our choices affect the survival chances of those outside of our communal and national boundaries. I think both Covid-19 and climate change may require some rethinking of the modern division between natural and moral evil. That is, instead of placing natural evils like flooding or diseases as rooted exclusively in natural causes and therefore outside the scope of human responsibility (moral evil) we need to factor the human impact on the environment and therefore consider how moral action or moral evil's triggers or provokes natural evil.

ii.

The discourse of evil is context-specific. This point follows from the previous one that the discourse of evil is evolving and therefore without a single essence or transhistorical meaning. The contemporary desire is to search for an overriding essence by discerning the 'nature' of evil and this is followed by elucidating a concept that is general and abstract enough so that it

can be applied to different situations and scenarios, evil actions or perpetrators. The essence of evil is usually identified by some understanding of human intentions reduced to rational-instrumental motives or something more sadistic that actively desires or pursues harm. What is meant by the idea of context-specific is very simply that the discourse of evil is most likely to be provoked by historical circumstances. Therefore, we ought to remain cautious of ascribing to the concept of evil a single nature or cause, which can explain evil action but whose causes may in fact be contested or its causes may be interpreted from a plurality of perspectives. Although this desire to find a single cause of evil is understandable so that a universal conception of evil is possible. I would nevertheless recommend looking at evil from a context-specific perspective and to resist the standard philosophical ambition to provide a single and final understanding of evil. Instead, we see the discourse of evil as undergoing transformations in response to the emergence of new kinds of evil, (previously unthinkable) or a more general change within the intellectual culture like the reformation or scientific revolution that overturn previous understandings which also affect how evil is comprehended. Although admittedly we have covered only one cultural-geographic space, we can note that unique historical circumstances have prompted a revaluation and evolution in the discourse of evil.

Significantly, rather than dismiss the contemporary desire to find a concept of evil that is general enough to account for different kinds of perpetrators or actions as some kind of hopeless search to end the problem of evil. I think we are better historicising this new discourse and understanding it as responding to an anxiety within liberalism or secular culture, an anxiety, that is propitiated by a deflated ethics heroically seeking to accommodate a plurality of perspectives but shorn of a robust understanding of evil. This anxiety is magnified by the re-emergence of religion and therefore the return of an old metaphysical enemy, represented by religion, and more specifically Islam. Indeed, the remergence of religion so spectacularly announced by the suicidal attacks in New York, also created an expectation that secular culture

must give a robust defence of its values. This was broadened out to include a defence of secular ethical and moral values, where the secular was felt to be lacking in comparison to religion, who despite 'superstitious' convictions could (supposedly) nevertheless point to a clear and robust understanding of evil. Modern secularity therefore has an obligation to itself, as the default worldview of most European intellectuals, to respond with an equally robust, exclusively this worldly interpretation of evil. The demand for a secular concept of evil has become an important dimension of the problem of evil and the discourse of evil today, something that might have been less compelling in previous generations.

Let us consider Arendt's interrogations of evil to illustrate the importance of context in the formation of the discourse of evil. What is noteworthy of Arendt is that while she definitely does make a point of Christian and theological conceptualisations of evil, she does so without any desire for asserting a secular concept of evil. In fact, her famous claim that evil will be the problem that Europe will have to interrogate after the war doesn't distinguish its religious or secular character. What is compelling about Arendt is her desire to comprehend the incomprehensible nature of evil that is so electrifying and makes her such an interesting intellectual and imaginative human being. Of course, her formulation of radical and banal evil is more intelligible against her criticism of secular ideologies like totalitarianism (that have brought forth these new kinds of evil) or metaphysical reduction of it to something like the satanic or the duality of 'good' and evil.' Indeed, we can use the notion of the context-specific discourse of evil to explain the differences between her understanding of radical and banal evil. Although Arendt's contributions to evil is synonymous with 'banality', it would be wrong to assume that this replaced or succeeded her earlier formulation of evil as radical, as this thesis previously showed. I don't think Arendt was saying that all evil is banal or that all Nazi evil was banal. But she picked up on a peculiar feature of evil or indeed a new context of evil within secular modernity, and more specifically within institutions operated under bureaucratic

rationality that gave evil a chilling rationality that was more unthinkable because of the banality of how it operated and its lack of a need for hate or envy as a motive. Therefore, I don't think banality necessarily disavows the absolute nature of radical evil she outlined in *OT*, but rather presents it in a different context to it. The context for radical evil is also structural but is not dominated by the airless rationality of the bureaucracy, but by, the perpetration of ideology and terror in the camps, and the attempted replacement of human freedom and human nature which necessitated a different kind of perpetrator and therefore a different conceptualisation of evil.

iii.

Comprehending evil is exhausting but it cannot be exhausted. The most difficult question raised within the discourse of evil is that of its incomprehensibility. It turns up in Augustine contemplating 'loving' his destruction in stealing the farmers pears, Kant debating the 'inscrutable' grounds of evil and Arendt on the violence in the camps which destroyed 'all standards' we know. It is backed by a consistent stream of adjectives from 'unintelligibility', 'extreme', 'unique', 'unthinkable', 'excess' and 'non-integratable' that give some magnitude of the action being comprehended. The incomprehensibility of evil is also easily identified with what might be horribly termed as 'great' evils like slavery, massive earthquakes, suicidal terrorism and since the second world war, the paradigmatic representation of incomprehensible evil, the holocaust.

More generally, the difficulty over incomprehensibility is not exclusively about the gravity or novelty of the violence or horror inflicted, but rather, a sense in which our claim to explain evil, or find reasons that make evil comprehensible are ultimately meaningless or futile. That is, there is an estrangement between our language, our ordinary experiences and then confronting something like factory slaughter or reading about the rape of children by their parents in warzones across the world. The incomprehensibility of evil is about the world no longer making sense, because our categories and concepts do not express or do what we

demand of them and that is to make the world comprehensible. Therefore, in claiming that comprehending evil is exhausting we are insisting that some actions will ineluctably exceed the limits of our language or thoughts to the extent that we shall have to satisfy ourselves with terms like extreme or something equivalent. However, the fact that comprehending evil cannot be exhausted refers to the human search for comprehension and meaning, regardless of our intellectual limits. Kant puts this nicely at the end of the *Groundwork* when he writes 'thus we do not indeed comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, yet we do comprehend its *incomprehensibility*, and this is all that can reasonably be required of a philosophy that in its principles strives up to the boundary of human reason.'[2] Kant's cautious reminder on the finite limits of human understanding is helpful as the guiding framework in remaining sceptical towards any final understanding of evil.

There is a tension here that needs clarifying especially with the earlier claims of evil being a complex changing discourse, and secondly a discourse that is context-specific. Although we have insisted that the search for comprehending incomprehensible evil must go on, we have placed ourselves in a difficult situation because the incomprehensibility of evil seems to bequeath an absoluteness to some action. That is, once we assert that some act or event is incomprehensible, we set a limit to thought and what can be said about it. This essentialises it, by 'reifying' evil into something that is transcendental or some naturalistic trait that afflicts human beings. Contemporary theorists of evil like Luke Russell seem to imply that the very notion of incomprehensibility is easily resolved once we grasp that what we mean by incomprehensibility can be understood if we list the causes of evil action or compare such actions with other historical atrocities. The 'mystique' that is built by naming evil as 'incomprehensible' loses its force once its causes are identified.

[2] Kant, *Groundwork* 60

One difficulty here is that there is an expectation amongst theorists of evil that unless we have explained an evil act or event, which is often invariably reduced to identifying its basic or efficient cause, motive or reason, we have somehow failed to comprehend evil. In this sense, the act of explanation which is identifying the nature of evil seems to overtake the act of comprehension. But comprehension belongs to understanding and is also more expansive as Arendt explains:

> Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which in our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight.[3]

For Arendt, and for myself, comprehension is an open-ended process, and this corresponds to the general claim that the discourse of evil is neither stable nor static, but going through continued revaluation and transformation. In an earlier chapter we noted this in the evolution of the discourse around the holocaust as the paradigmatic representation of evil in the twentieth century. For early commentators like Arendt, Wiesel, Fackenheim and Levinas, the horrors of the extermination camps could not be translated into intellectual categories and could therefore only be deemed 'unique', 'impossible' and 'incomparable.' However, with the frequency of the act of genocide having unfortunately multiplied throughout the twentieth century, there are models for comparison. The literature on Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda have presented some recurring similarities that allow us to make a better attempt at comprehension. Therefore, we ought not to be burdened with the expectation that we have to strive for absolute comprehension, otherwise we have failed to comprehend. Instead, we need take note and pay humility to the limits of our thoughts and the limits of the concepts we have been making use of, recognising that the act comprehending evil never stops once we stop comprehending.

[3] Arendt, *Origins*, x

iv.

The discourse of evil cannot be reduced to a religious or a secular register, but rather we find it ineluctably drawing from both religious and secular sources to make the concept intelligible. We highlighted the fundamental importance of religion and the secular in the formation of modern secular European identity. These categories also presuppose a set of other binaries that include, but are not limited to, supernatural/natural and private/public, which invest secular identity with a sense of pride and accomplishment in having overcome backwardness, immaturity or more specifically religion. In chapter three, we examined how the categories of religion and secular have become the basic ground through which evil is made intelligible and how they came to replace the distinction we began with, namely, the form/matter distinction. Firstly, through the revaluation of secular life during the reformation that eventually turns the *saeculum* into the space of redemption and where evils elimination takes place. And secondly, through the enlightenment critique of religion, evil is either comprehended naturalistically and therefore understood as any kind of moral wrongdoing or deemed as supernatural and therefore outside of a secular intelligibility and thus belonging to the realm or space of religion.

However, whilst the binary of religion and the secular is essential to the self-understanding of modern Europe as it is to making sense of the discourse of evil, it nevertheless, rests upon mythologies that hinder us from comprehending evil. Firstly, is the sense in which religion is found everywhere and everywhere it is generally the same, this very Protestant self-understanding, turns the religious task of comprehending evil into one of making sense of spirits and therefore exorcising the spiritual if evil is to be comprehended. Yet, as we noted this notion of religion is also a secular construction, in which what was transhistorical about religion was its beliefs in spiritual or supernatural beings. Nevertheless, what this construction has contributed to is a sense in which if the explanation of evil fails to corresponded to nature, it is either eliminated or its content is deflated to the extent that it is intelligible only as the result

of social or natural reasons. Secondly, this mythology also relies on showing that religion is an opponent of secular reason or secular life in general. This cements the belief that religious and secular explanations of politics, morality or indeed evil are fundamentally incompatible. One possible expectation of this binary division is the intelligibility of self-destructive, meaningless suffering or banal perpetrators can realistically only be understood independently from one another. However, my analysis of Kant and Arendt has shown that making sense of evil through a religious or secular codifications is neither realistic nor desirable given radical evil tends to resist comprehension altogether. More generally, and moving forwards, despite the power and influence of the categories of religion and secularity upon European culture and society, it would be misleading to see religion and secularity as constructs that are immutably opposed. In the introduction we made use of Löwith's thesis that modern philosophical history takes its belief in human progress from a secularised reading of eschatology. In chapter four, we also noted how difficult it was to separate the motives for religious violence from secular violence. Therefore, a clear separation between religion and the secular will always put-up certain tensions and resistance.

What we have suggested throughout this thesis is that although the binary of religion and secularity is the background for the comprehension of evil in a secular age, the discourse of evil isn't reducible one of these categories. In the final section of the thesis, we highlighted Taylor's postulate of cross-pressures as revealing the importance of making use of both secular and religious conceptualisations in the comprehension of evil. An important part of the discourse of radical and banal evil produced by Kant and Arendt respectively, is the limits of secular categorisations like motive, intention, crime, perpetrators, practical rationality, guilt, judgement and responsibility in comprehending evil. Indeed, trying to comprehend evil but not having the concepts to make sense of evil has meant a drawing upon a religious register in the intelligibility of evil. This was particularly true in the chapter on Arendt. Arendt had noted that

the traditional measurements of analysing perpetrator behaviour like survival, self-interest and utilitarian planning were absent in the decisions that went into the perpetration of the holocaust. The trial of Eichmann compounded the problem of incomprehensibility, in that it brought forward a perpetrator who was without malice or a direct motive to murder, which seemed to undermine how we think about criminal guilt or personal responsibility. Therefore, the entire tenor of denoting totalitarian evil as radically incomprehensible or Eichmann as a banal thoughtless perpetrator took the meaning of evil beyond secular intelligibility or conceptualisations. The common thread uniting Arendt and Augustine further illustrates the resilience of religious conceptualisations of evil and that trying to disentangle evil from religion either puts up resistance or one is drawn towards some previous religious iteration of evil. We also noted this resilience of religion in Kant's conceptualisation of the good will, which on closer inspection from his critics, seemed to be premised on an Augustinian or Lutheran notion of a defective, sinful will. Later when Kant came to 'correct' this notion of the will with a more comprehensive and spontaneous one, he was drawn towards justifying its nihilistic consequences by grounding it in a timeless original evil maxim and a moral propensity to evil. This led to complaints that he was merely re-writing the doctrine of Original Sin to satisfy the concerns of religious conservatives.

One further and conceivable deduction is that the inscrutability and incomprehensibility of evil is also suggestive of the fact that the discourse of evil also problematises the religion and secular binary. That is, whilst our intention has been to highlight only one side of the relationship between religion-secularity and evil, namely, to show the emergence of these two binaries and their central importance in making sense of evil in modernity and how this division prevents us from coming to terms with our understanding of evil. The existence of a radically powerful and incomprehensible of evil is also a powerful reminder of how evil throws into doubt the utility of religion and the secular binary in making sense of existence.

v.

The secularisation of evil takes place within a Christianity culture. Throughout this thesis we have been making sense of the discourse of evil in a secular age. However, parallel to this we have endeavoured to suggest that the traditional narrative of secularisation as a simple movement away from Christian beliefs fails to do justice to life in a secular age. We noted at the beginning of this thesis the significance of Taylor's work and his interpretation of the secular age as the basic axis through which existence, belief and culture is made sense of in Europe today. For Taylor, what is essential to secularisation is the change in the condition of Christian belief that have made it impossible believe the older beliefs that were naively grounded on supernaturalism and a 'porous' as opposed to a modern 'buffered' understanding of the self. What I took from this work and look to have developed is a sense in which firstly, it is Christian rationality expressed variously in nominalism, the reformation and the enlightenment; and secondly, Christian universalism expressed through the religious reform of society and subsequently the enlightenment justification of the 'political' as an autonomous realm of existence, that was the driver for secularisation. More specifically, scientific empiricism, the mind/body dualism, political sovereignty or private property rights emerged in dialogue *with* Christianity and *through* scriptural debates on the nature of God, the consequences of original sin or the *dominium* bequeathed to Adam over the earth. A secularisation of theological concepts, as Schmitt puts it, takes place mostly in the nineteenth-century when the bitterness between religion and science reaches a kind of watermark. But we might say that the secular desire to universalise its scientific rationalism, political freedoms or exclusive humanism is not done in opposition to Christianity, but is done in a more radical working out of Christian universalism.

The traditional narratives of secularisation that Taylor described as 'subtraction stories' also gives rise to an expectation that the secularisation of evil may reasonably be traced to the

disenchantment and the movement away from believing in evil spirits or malevolent forces. Whilst this might be true, this doesn't entirely negate the role of Christianity as contributing to the secularisation of evil. This is illustrated in the significance of Augustine as an essential influence upon Kant's understanding of a depraved will or upon Arendt's habituation of sin and the shallow banality of Eichmann. Furthermore, today, the relentless purification and elimination of metaphysics or traces of religion for the sake of a practical and rational secular concept of religion is not far removed from the desire of reformers to destroy idols, repudiate saints and eliminate magic from the world. The comparative zeal uniting Christian love for truth and the scientific practical rationality was famously brought together by Nietzsche under the ascetic ideal. The history of "disenchantment" or of de-magific-ation does not begin with the rise of the modern scientific worldview. The latter continues rather than breaks with the Christian spirit that wants, above all, to free human beings from the evil of spiritually corrupting spirits, spirits that want, above all, to overcome what was conceived as the "superstitious" understandings of the world and the significance of our lives (they thought) so characteristic of the spiritually corrupt – the ones who bring evil into the world.

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