



Evil be Thou my Good¹: Does the concept of evil have a place in psychoanalytic thinking?

Chris Joannidis

“...the power [The Force] has to transform men to things is bidirectional: it petrifies (in a different but equal manner) the psyche of both those who suffer it, and those who exercise it.”
 -Simone Weil

Evil as an extreme variation of ‘the bad’, cannot be found in the psychoanalytic vocabulary. Even the term ‘bad’ itself, is but afforded a rather restricted usage. It carries no ethical dimension and is used exclusively as a qualifying adjective for a part-object, signifying the fact that the particular object is not providing satisfaction to the self’s drive needs. Both Freud and Klein agree that splitting and projection (expulsion) of this experience from the ego, leaves the ego in both a state of satisfaction (reduction of tension) and under a paranoid threat of retaliation. The repeated introjections and re-projections, together with a sense of guilt and need for reparation, instituted by the Depressive Position, gradually establish within the psyche, the moral principles of Goodness and Evil. This, according to André Green, cannot but be recognized as a foundational process of the human psyche.

Within the wider philosophical field however – even though its original meaning was purely psychological, *what one desires to avoid,....because it is a source of harm* (Pagels, 1989 p. 143) – ‘Evil’ or ‘Badness’ nowadays refers to a particular way of relating to the Law, be it moral, divine, or civil.

One starts from the ascertainment that terms like evil or badness and aggression, transgression of the law or destruction should in no way be considered synonyms. One can easily imagine an aggressive/destructive act to which the characterization evil would not apply, e.g. the destruction of a symbiotic syncytium as an indispensable element needed for individuation, or as we are reminded by Sabine Spielrein ‘Destruction [can be] the Cause of Coming into Being’. Destruction can also be experienced as an artistic creation like the 1995 happening called ‘dropping of a Han dynasty urn’. Even a transgression of the law due to political resistance issues and/or conscientious objection, can be seen as containing elements of destruction. Bion is particularly emphatic when he links emotional evolution and growth to psychic changes which because they destroy the preceding state of mind, he characterizes as “catastrophic”. All this inevitably leads to the need for a clearly framed and coherent definition of the loose continuum known as ‘badness’ or ‘evil’ At one end stand feelings of guilt relating to a transgression of the prohibited – the temptation of the forbidden as an irresistible allure, the multilevel satisfaction promised by the actual transgression, the guilt and the attempts at

¹ A line from John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

expiation etc., all of which is well known and ordinary. At the other end though, stands something quite different, something with which one cannot possibly empathize or identify, and hence is very difficult to define. We are referring to an extreme form of badness, usually given the appellation 'evil'.

Various extensive elucidations of the phenomenon are on offer – mainly by non-psychoanalytic thinkers – and it is a combination of these viewpoints that might possibly capture the elusiveness of the term:

- a) The term evil is not used to describe aggressiveness or some other biblical sin but an uncontrollable destructiveness, a state of mind devoid of guilt, concern or empathy towards the object on the receiving end of the action perpetrated. It involves an attempt at annihilation of the Good. If the Good engenders envy (because it imposes a realization of inequality and dependence as well as possible eventual feelings of gratitude) its eradication through envy, leaves behind nothing to be envied, and so rids the envious one from the discomfort of having to feel envy. Evil, either defined as an active deed or as a passive suffering, is in both cases headed towards nothingness, and is hence characterized by the dread that that evokes. (Alford, 1997 p.118) On the other hand, evil is not the evil act per se, but the fact of being a 'lover' of evil. (Green, 1988 p.251)
- b) Evil does not refer to a simple absence or minimization of good, but to an autonomous active principle whose aim is the repudiation or annihilation of The Good or, in other words, of life itself. "It is not only the negative of good, it is the *negation* of [the concept of] good" (Bell, 2015, p.411) resulting in chaos or indeed nothingness. Consequently evil is understood to be the establishment of a quasi-logically justified reversal of subjective awareness, masterfully achieved through the use of deliberate distortions of the truth. The aim is the annihilation, the wiping out of the personality of the Other (their psychic murder) thus gaining total dominance over them. All this without the Other's biological extinction so that prolongation of the procedure is secured. We are referring to a deeply subjective feeling of paralyzing dread that the perpetrator has (some would call it 'nameless dread') which is so deep and primitive that the only way of getting rid of it, is an active concrete action that would result in the agent observing the dread in the eyes of The Other, thus providing reassurance that it no longer resides in the agent's own self. We therefore define evil as the action having no recognizable sense, which through the exploitation of a faceless and dehumanized Other, enacts the trauma of the psychic murder that the perpetrator had once putatively experienced. The victim experiences a meaningless breakdown of all sense of trust in the fundamental benignity of men, of any belief in the security of dependence and of all possibility of future reparation. (Alford, 1997)
- c) According to Hanna Arendt, the preconception that Evil is derived solely from the commonplace sin of egoism, needs to be questioned. The radical evil that we are referring to (a term first used by Kant), is not linked to humanly understandable sinful motivations. Its intentionality is nothing less than to render man-as-man redundant. And this can be achieved the moment any trace of 'the unforeseen' is obliterated. If a sine qua non of human existence is spontaneity, obliteration of such spontaneity would necessarily mean the immediate obliteration of free will. The origins of this condition cannot but be a delusional conviction of omnipotence approaching the tragic *hybris*, embedded in the mind of the perpetrator – something far beyond the common wishes for control and power. It is impossible for one to feel empathy with such a condition, because it has been deprived of the

quality with which badness is usually recognized by human beings i.e. a forbidden temptation, a potentially forgivable sin or even a crime of passion. (Arendt, 2000) A pertinent example would be deliberate torture which, when stripped of its ‘information gathering’ alibi, stands out as a dehumanising reification of the Other, through the ruthless infliction of bodily pain. Bodily pain is especially selected because – it is suggested – “whatever bodily pain achieves, it achieves it through its unsharability through language” (Scarry 1985 p. 4) i.e. its resistance to finding adequate representation in words. No concise articulation of the bodily experience of pain in logos, ends up establishing a condition devoid of natural human-to-human empathy.

Philosophical preoccupation with the concept of Evil (or The Bad) is first encounter in Plato. Socrates’ position (as expressed in the dialogue known as Protagoras) i.e. “... *as regards the Bad, no one willingly approaches it*”² (Protagoras #358) and hence that its existence is but the result of *ignorance* is well known. Less well known is Aristotle’s position according to which “... *within us lie both virtue and evil, and it is within us to act or not to act ... no one is unwillingly happy, but one is only willingly evil...*”³ (Nic. Eth. III #1113 V) According to him, both urges exist within one’s psychic sphere as potentialities, so willingly or unwillingly we bear the responsibility for the permission of either one to surface. Aristotle does not mention lack (of knowledge) as a causative factor, but instead, makes mention of the opposition (conflict) between the two.

The search for reasons for the existence of Evil, is concisely expressed – even if as an unanswerable aporia – by Epicurus, who with his ‘Paradox’ leads one’s thinking to a *reductio ad absurdum*: how can the idea of an all-good and all-powerful God coincide with the existence of evil? Neoplatonism, on the other hand, through the writings of its exponent Plotinus, relieves God of any responsibility by proposing that “... *one would call evil a malady of the soul.... it is matter itself then, that is the cause both of the malady of the soul and of evil.*”⁴ (Enneads I, 8, 14) His student Proclus on the other hand, defines evil as an accidental collateral by-product with no intention, cause or telos, and as to its essence indefinite – a *para*-substance (*parhypostasis*).⁵

Christianity faces the same dilemma – the dilemma which, centuries later will be given the name *theodicy*. Even though the Bible confirms that “*I am the Lord who creates peace and builds evil*” (Isaiah 45:7) the belief in an All-Loving and All-Powerful God who identifies with love and forgiveness, renders the existence of Evil beyond all understanding. Two very different theologians of the 4th century, independently suggest the same solution to the problem of theodicy. In the West, St. Augustine states: “*Evil does not have its own essential nature, it is the absence of goodness that is given that name*”⁶ In the East, St Gregory of Nyssa states: “*one cannot conceive of any other reason for the existence of evil, but absence of goodness.*”⁷

² «...ἐπί γε τὰ κακὰ οὐδείς ἐκὼν ἔρχεται»

³ «... ἐφ’ ἡμῖν δὴ καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ κακία, ἐν οἷς γὰρ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν τὸ πράττειν, καὶ τὸ μὴ πράττειν.....μακάριος μὲν γὰρ οὐδείς ἄκων, ἡ δὲ μοχθηρία ἐκούσιον »

⁴ «εἰ δὲ τις ἀσθενεῖαν ψυχῆς τὴν κακίαν λέγοι.....ὕλη τοίνυν, καὶ ἀσθενείας ψυχῆι αἰτία, καὶ κακίας αἰτία »

⁵ De malorum subsistentia pr.50

⁶ “mali enim nulla natura est; sed amissio boni mali nomen accepit”

⁷ «ου γαρ ἐστιν ἄλλην κακίας γένεσιν ἐννοήσαι ἢ ἀρετῆς ἀπουσίαν»

We are face to face here, with a powerful abstract monism, where it is absence (lack) that is conceptualized as ‘the evil’ and not the presence of an other, equivalent urge, standing in opposition to ‘the good’. The identification of absence with evil (the bad) carries special significance for psychoanalytic thinking. When Bion claims that *nothing* is basically a *no-thing*, i.e. that the absence of an object is in fact the presence of a non-satisfying (bad) object^{8 9}, or that the bad object (the hate object according to Freud) is defined as the one that does not satisfy the libidinal drive, or indeed when narcissistic deficits are seen as sources of negative emotions, then theology and psychoanalysis appear to be following the same monistic pathway. Monism after all, has had a very special place in psychoanalytic thinking all along.

The Gnostic heresy on the other hand, following in the footsteps of the neoplatonic worldview, resolves the theodicy problem by imagining an Evil (malignant) *Demiourge* (Creator) who has constructed a deceptive universe to conceal pure Knowledge (Gnosis). According to them, man is condemned to live in this false (evil) world of matter, excluded from the Good. Evil is conceived as absence of good, once again.

Advancing to later years, we encounter two poets who seriously engage with the representation of evil in theology i.e. with the Devil. Apart from the title of this essay (which refers to the distortion / perversion of ethical thinking as a trademark of Evil) John Milton’s masterpiece contains the following verses: “*To reign is worth ambition though in Hell: / Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven.*” In contrast to the Socratic lack of motivation and knowledge, here the incentives for evil are very clear, they pertain to the so called *Libido Dominandi* (*urge to dominate*) – what Freud would years later call ‘the mastery drive’ (Bemächtigungstrieb). Goethe’s Devil on the other hand, defines himself as “I am the Spirit that forever negates, and rightfully so, since everything that exists deserves to perish, better if it hadn’t ever existed.”¹⁰ We see here once again, how reversal and subversion emerge as a central component of evil. Equally one cannot but notice in these lines, the fundamental principle of *entelechy* that one would later encounter in Freud’s writings i.e. that every living creature is headed towards death (that the aim of life is death – the return to the inorganic state.) Goethe calls it the principle of Evil, Freud calls it the Death Drive.

More or less contemporaneous, is the treatise of Hobbes which appears to be prioritizing human subjectivity as opposed to the traditional emphasis on essence, when it states that: “[f]or these words Good, Evill and Contemtable, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of Good or Evill to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves.” (Hobbes, 1651 p. 43) Approaching this subject from a very different perspective, Emmanuel Kant, also steers clear of theology, and moves to proposing the concept of a “Radical Evil”, i.e. an evil that is well rooted in one’s being. He attributes the origins of this condition to a fundamental deficit in the individual’s free will, which will permit the uninhibited bypassing of the autonomous ethical ‘maxims’ that are meant to be imbued with a profound sense of duty. This deficit opens the way for the constitutionally innate but ethically untined instinctual urges to emerge.

⁸ O’Shaughnessy, E. (1964) The Absent Object. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*. 1(2): 34-43

⁹ There is some affinity to what in philosophy is known as *negative causality*.

¹⁰ “Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint! / Unde das mit Recht; denn alles was entsteht / ist werth dass es

zu Grunde geht; / Drum besser wär’s dass nichts entstünde.”

Human nature (whichever instinctual urges it may contain) is according to him, not responsible for the emergence of evil – man is not at the urges’ mercy. The responsibility lies exclusively with one’s free will – with the freedom he/she has been accorded. It is this freedom which has also given meaning to the Original Sin, the very first encounter of man with evil. Freedom ends up having a cost, and that is the existence of evil. It is only through free will that one can either submit to or evade the categorical imperative, and – admits Kant – the reasons that lead to defiance of the categorical imperative, apart from *self-love* (“*Selbstliebe*”) which appears to be quite significant, remain totally incomprehensible. (Kant, 1990)

After Kant, we come across Hegel who refers to the teleological necessity of the existence of evil. In a particularly controversial proposition he argues that: “... *the drive in general ... is nothing else than that something is in itself, itself and the lack of itself, in one and the same respect... Something is alive, therefore, only to the extent that it contains contradiction within itself: indeed force is this, to hold and endure contradiction within.*”¹¹ (Hegel, 2013 p.75) Consequently according to this dialectic dynamic, in order for ‘the good’ to exist as something with a distinct meaning, it depends by definition, on its negative which is ‘the bad/evil’. And it is this combination that will then proceed toward a reconciliatory/transforming *sublation* [*Aufhebung*]. Hegelian evil as a never-ending dialectic necessity, does not seem to explain much, as regards its causes and/or vicissitudes, but it simply records its existential presence. The spiral evolution based on alternating processes of binding, unbinding and re-binding, is presented as a manifestation of Being itself. Somewhere here one recalls the words of Dostoevsky who has the Devil claim: “...pain and suffering are life, without pain, what would be the meaning of pleasure?” (Dostoevsky, 1963 p.726)

Vehement disagreement with this position can be surely detected in the argumentation of Emmanuel Levinas. Evil, in other words absolute suffering, cannot possibly be the negative of the good, and thus to have as its entelechy the expectation of the return of the good – a condition that is reminiscent of what in another language would be called “masochism as the guardian of life”. Such a conceptualization, would for Levinas, be a justification and acceptance of evil as part of the Good, which to him, is an unacceptable logical and ethical oxymoron. Evil must be seen as an overflowing excess, as an unjustifiable, i.e. irreducible disturbance. Evil, according to him, cannot but stand as the ‘uncontainable in the order of things’. Levinas who considers responsibility towards an Other, as the quintessence of human existence, insists that Evil lies beyond human understanding. He writes: “Evil is not only the non-integrable, it is also the non-integrability of the non-integrable.”¹² (Levinas, 1978 p. 65) His argument demolishes any reassuring functional circularity and introduces the disturbingly incomprehensible and the a-logical. This quality of Evil is characterized by Levinas, as the “*suffering of no use*”[“*souffrance inutile*”], which

¹¹ “... *der Trieb* überhaupt nichts anderes, als daß Etwas *in sich selbst* und der Mangel, *das Negative seiner selbst*, in einer und derselben Rücksicht ist.... Etwas ist also lebendig, nur insofern es den Widerspruch in sich enthält, und zwar diese Kraft ist, den Widerspruch in sich zu fassen und auszuhalten.”

¹² “le mal n’est pas seulement le non intégrable, il est aussi la non-intégrabilité du non intégrable.”

cannot but be an iteration of Nietzsche's often quoted expression "*the meaninglessness of suffering*" ["die Sinnlosigkeit des Leidens".]

The traumatogenic and hence psychologically justifiable version of evil – a point of view with which a number of psychoanalysts are in agreement – starts with Nietzsche. In his book *The Genealogy of Morals*, he links evil (which he distinguishes from the simply bad) to an anti-life force of vindictiveness and viciousness which stems from a sense of impotence and weakness when facing privilege. He uses the French term *ressentiment* (resentment) and describes it as a particularly virulent force whose aim is to pervert and reverse moral values (*Umkehrung der Werthe*), i.e. 'the strong' to become 'undesirable' and the 'weak and servile', to become 'desirable'. In cases where this resentment is directed to one's own self, and not outwards, it leads to total extermination of both thinking and meaning and ends up in mental and psychic nihilism. Nietzsche is curious about how it is possible for a force so inimical to life, whose purpose is to subjugate life through distortion and blemishing of its most precious elements, not to get extinguished over time? What existential gain does its maintenance offer, he queries. It is not difficult to discern here, the beginnings of psychoanalytic ideas connecting evil with concepts like hatred, envy, -K, perverse thinking etc., as well as the recognition of the inorganic as a *telos*. Equally one can also detect, the well known tug-of-war between 'conflict and deficit' that has coloured psychoanalytic theories regarding the ontogenesis of symptomatology.

Another instance of grudge as a source of evil, can be found in the Muslim devil, named Iblis. He represents the intrepid disobedience against divine Law, because of an allegedly unjustified misrecognition of the original (and ongoing) exclusive and absolute allegiance of the fallen archangel to God. (Bodman, 2011 p.15-18) Here too, evil is defined as a reaction to an experience of the narcissistic trauma of injustice, not as something autogenic.

Amongst the postwar theorists writing on the subject of evil, (except the above mentioned Levinas) the most prominent positions are held by people such as Hannah Arendt, Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno. Hannah Arendt starts with the Kantian notion of 'radical evil' to which she give her own definition, mentioned already. According to her, the function of the radical evil advances in three stages: a) the annihilation of the legal persona in man, b) the annihilation of the ethical persona in man (all conscience issues to become arbitrary, and inconsistent)¹³ and c) the annihilation of individuality i.e. of spontaneity and of the generative function, in other words of free will¹⁴ (as e.g. the experiments of Milgram and those at Stanford Prison by Zimbardo have convincingly shown.)¹⁵ Subsequently Arendt introduces the term 'banality of evil', which describes how evil pertains to processes beyond

¹³ In ancient Athens slaves lay outside the considerations of human justice, because their very status as slaves (being owned [*καὶ ὁ δοῦλος κτήματι ἔμψυχον*]) – even if adventitious – deprived them of the quality of being human. (Williams, 1993, p.72-3) Any moral issue, was thereby slyly bypassed.

¹⁴ The French psychoanalyst F. Pasche describes perversion using very similar terms. He writes: "... [perversion] is a mode of relating with the Other that is very partial, incomplete and implies... a kind of amputation of the Other of what would make him a [whole] human being..." (Pasche 1983 p. 400)

¹⁵ When philosopher Giorgio Agamben years later makes use of the Latin notion of *homo sacer*, which entails the legitimization of 'killing with impunity', as a result of one's having been stripped of all their humanity and left beyond the order of things human, with only one's 'bare aliveness', he draws attention to the fact that this very predicament renders this man 'sacer', meaning (as Freud aptly reminds us) both sacred and accursed at the same time !

understandable human sins and criminal actions, and how close it can get to the radical eradication of thinking. One is dealing with a human choice which has no concrete sinister intentionality or aim, but is only a (momentary or sustained) profound splitting off from thinking and empathizing i.e. a serious decoupling from normal life, which allows for life to go on uninhibited and unaffected. Nullification of thinking and empathizing with the fellow man, corresponds to radical annulment of ethics as well. Psychoanalysis would translate that as splitting of the ego, denial, isolation etc.

The ‘banality of evil’ is, according to Arendt, a description of shallowness – a radical evil but with no roots, be they evil or malignant intentions or devious machinations. What is being alluded to is a nascent and controversial concept which has to be placed in the category that Kant calls ‘beyond understanding and rationality’ without in any way relieving it of its most heavy responsibilities.

Left leaning philosophers like Horkheimer and Adorno on the other hand, attribute Kant’s radical evil to social mechanisms resulting from the current prevalence of rationalism and most particularly an aspect of it which bears the name ‘*instrumental logic*’ and whose ends-oriented intentionality inevitably leads to the dehumanization and reification of man. (Horkheimer, 1967) The mechanisms of such a logic, result in a non-autonomous and unfree choice in favour of internal animal urges like that of domination and exploitation. This Marxism inspired view about the alienation and reification of man, adds one further layer of understanding to the concept of evil. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969) Horkheimer and Adorno, just like Kant, recognize as source for this process, the element of boundless self-love, and that, irrespective of whether it involves individuals or collective entities. In the parallel language, one would probably be referring to the predominance of narcissistic needs as opposed to anaclitic ones.

Moving on to the psychoanalytic theories now, one observes that analytic thinking has given a prominent position to the so-called drive binary which is expressed as the opposition between Eros and the Death Drive (or the Destructiveness Drive according to Freud) or in its newest version between Eros and Anteros. (Penot, 2017) One is referring to forces that bind, that unite, that create order, that structure and create on the one hand, and forces that unbind, that tear and rupture, that deconstruct and lead to chaos and entropy on the other – forces that increase tension and forces that decrease tension. This new concept of Anteros is defined as “the principle of pleasure-through-the-group-situation under the aegis of the Law of the Father” (Braunschweig & Fain, 1971 p.11) in other words it stands for the limitations to dyadic sexual fulfilment imposed by the group situation. If therefore, the complementary double Eros-Anteros is characterized by the alternation of creation-of-bonds and dissolution-of-bonds, and hence by a fusion of drives, then the Death Drive is pure unfused unbinding. (Green 1999b p. 85) ‘Evil of no use’ (or ‘evil without a why’ as André Green prefers to call it) is a total unbinding and hence without any hint of object relationship, without any capacity for representation, without any possibility of meaning giving – just a denuded meaningless force. Such a force is in no position to give birth to desire, hence only mechanically enacts (within an indifferent and sense-deprived psyche, unable to phantasize or dream) sterile acts of tension release.

One should not fail to mention at this juncture, that when one makes use of the term *Anteros*, given that it also contains the notion of specular correspondence and mutuality inherent in the prefix *anti-*, the emphasis cannot but fall equally on the libidinal and ontologically developmental aspect of the encounter, rather than only on

its confrontational/conflictual dimension – on its life-affirming unbinding linked to whole-object relating and not only on its life-negating unbinding linked to part-object relating. This mirroring dynamic becomes most clear when we appreciate that a) the blossoming of an erotic complementarity cannot but be based on the recognition that with the shattering of primary narcissism, *the object of the subject's desire becomes the desire of the Other* i.e. the Other as a desired object is at the same time, a desiring subject in itself. (Braunschweig & Fain, 1971 p.129) and b) as regards its transfer onto the analytic unfolding, it can best be described as, “The analyst destroys the patient's manifest texts in order to reveal unconscious meanings¹⁶, and the patient destroys the analyst through that particular object usage we call transference ... for a good destruction of the analyst to take place, one that is not constituted out of the death instinct, but is part of the life instinct...” (Bollas 1989 p.36) It is a great paradox indeed that, taken to its extreme, binding can lead to merger, which is another way of destroying links – dependent as links are on clear demarcations. Caesura on the other hand, which is the word Bion borrows from Freud for the demarcation par excellence (i.e. the life-giving unbinding of birth) being analogous to a neural synapse, is – according to him – both a fissure, a gap and a link.¹⁷

The unfortunate name [*Death Drive*] that Freud has chosen for this instinctual urge, often automatically results in incredulity, both because it implies or rather confirms the suspicion that deep within each one of us (right from our very birth) there lie seeds of our own demise, and also because it causes considerable confusion, because it ends up conjoining two very different functions:

- a) that of a neutral force, component of the circle of life, which as a counterweight to binding processes, promotes unbinding, so that new binding arrangements can ensue. As such it carries no moral value or motivation e.g. like gravity and its relation to construction work, and it stands as a fundamental principle of the order-disorder cycle, beyond any virtue-vice axis. Reflecting on Freud's fort/da dynamic, Lacan has astutely observed that: “... [the subject's] ... action destroys the object that it causes to appear and disappear..... The symbol [i.e. the word] manifests itself ...as the murder of the thing, and this death constitutes in the subject, the eternalization of his desire.” (Lacan, 1977 p. 103-4)
- b) that of a purposefully catastrophic force whose motivation and aim is the inhibition, indeed annihilation of all creativity and structuring, in other words, of all living processes, be they linear or circular. As such it is easy to include this force within the morality axis and most particularly to see it as the representation of non-satisfaction i.e. of evil/badness.

Consequently a destruction / unbinding could potentially be creating space for the engenderment of a new structure, or alternatively, a destruction / unbinding could

¹⁶ Freud's notion of “*by way of extraction (per via di levare)*” as the analyst's modus operandi, is not that dissimilar.

¹⁷ He writes: “[i]nvestigate the caesura; not the analyst, not the analysand; but the caesura, the link....” (Bion 1977 p. 57)

potentially be sterilizing creativity and maintaining chaos / entropy – two functions, both under the name *Death Drive*.

In its first meaning, this drive is responsible for functions like the moving away from the primary object and the investment in a new one (the simplest being the moving away of the gaze, the abandonment to sleep, and of course the move to the third). André Green focuses on the life-promoting dimension of unbinding, when he recognizes its presence, in the developmental achievement of being able to say ‘no’ for the first time. (Green, 1981, σελ.318) Chris Bollas adds: “[In] the patient-analyst relationship each participant destroys the other’s perception and rhetorical rendering of events, to create that third intermediate object....” (Bollas, 1992 σελ.112) It is obvious by now, that destruction is an indispensable element for the completion of mourning (disinvestment) but also for the developmentally necessary process of subjectivation. Subjectivity, writes Loewald, “is understood as the creative-destructive spontaneity and force of nature.” (Loewald, 1987 σελ. 515) The same double action is highlighted by Warren Poland who, whilst defining “witnessing” as a central function of the analyst in the analytic situation, writes: “witnessing develops from holding but implies letting go.” (Poland, 2000 p.21) It is high time therefore, for Bollas’ afore-mentioned proposition, that generative destruction / unbinding, is in fact pro Life Drive and not against it, to be more widely recognized.

In its second meaning, this drive has been extensively conceptualized and described by a variety of authors and in a variety of clinical instances:

A) Freud highlights that this innate drive, part of the ontologic binary, is always to be found in fusion with libidinal forces and never autonomous¹⁸. “It’s aim is to loosen connections and thereby to deconstruct”¹⁹ he writes (1938 p.71) This deconstruction involves objects as well as ego-functions and leads towards conditions where needs would have been extinguished, thus no tension would be discernable, hence nirvana would have been achieved. Such a deconstruction could either have the manifest active form of destruction (what Freud calls ‘the blind fury of destructiveness’²⁰) or have a quasi-passive clandestine form of insidious sabotage or indeed a very slow, silent form of undermining. The question of whether the drive satisfaction derived from the deconstruction (destructiveness) is a result of drive-fusion or whether the Death Drive has its own satisfaction mechanisms, remains controversial.²¹ The same query is raised for the instances where the Death Drive is directed inwards, i.e. satisfaction derived from pain. Finally there is the view that the Death Drive does not seek satisfaction in the way we usually understand the term, but is content with a non-representational mechanical discharge of the high tension existing within the psyche. Object

¹⁸ “...we never have to deal with pure death- or life drives, but with mixtures of them in different amounts.” [... dass wir überhaupt nicht mit reinen Todes- und Lebenstrieben, sondern nur mit verschiedenwertigen Vermengungen derselben rechnen] (Freud, 1924, p. 376)

¹⁹ “Zusammenhänge aufzulösen und so die Dinge zu zerstören”

²⁰ “noch in der blindesten Zerstörungswut....” (Freud, 1930 p.480)

²¹ Freud states that destruction as an aim of the Death Drive “... is linked to a high degree of narcissistic enjoyment, since it offers the ego, some sort of fulfilment of its prior wishes for omnipotence.” [daß seine Befriedigung mit einem außerordentlich hohen narzißtischen Genuß verknüpft ist, indem sie dem Ich die Erfüllung seiner alten Allmachtswünsche zeigt] (1930, p.480)

Relations theorists naturally have a very different conceptualization of all this.

- B) Klein and Object Relations theorists, in agreement with Freud as regards the innate character of this force, focus on a very specific form of emotional relating that they call envy, and which they identify as the manifestation of the Death Drive par excellence. Distinguishing feature of envy, is that it pertains to an aggressive stance towards a ‘good’, ‘need-satisfying’ object and not a ‘bad’ or ‘frustrating’ one. Any inequality, any satisfying offering which thereby underscores need and dependence since one’s own resources are not enough, leads to the triggering of this envious force which then flattens or extinguishes all differences, and exterminates anything that could possibly stand as a source for such envy. Occasionally this force ends up being directed towards good internal objects, and then we have a particularly malignant self-sabotaging condition known as ‘self-envy’. Paradoxically it is always ‘goodness’ that triggers envy (or should one say, Mephistopheles). Loyal to the Freudian viewpoint, Klein claims that this innate force is initially directed inwards, true to its entelechy of a final demise. Thus, it is only due to these active movements of projections, introjections and further projections that a functional homeostasis is eventually established within the developing psychic world. André Green disagrees, and suggests that the notorious drive is from the very beginning, simultaneously directed both outwards (sadism) and inwards (masochism). [Green, 1999b]
- C) The loosening of bindings, recognized by Freud as one of the most important functions of this drive, has been studied from a variety of angles. Just as in a social setting, a permanent distancing or a schizoid withdrawal to a personal symbolic retreat has dire consequences, so too, at the psychic level, the loosening of bindings represents a malignant, and indeed almost deadly eventuality. Two notable authors have thought and written incisively on this subject:

Bion has studied the so-called ‘Attacks on Linking’’. In these particular instances destructiveness has as its aim the function of the epistemophilic drive which is located in the mind. We take it as a given, that the desire for knowledge (including self-knowledge) as an expression of the epistemophilic drive, forms part of Eros (Life Drive) formed as it is, by the linking and the integration of elements of perception, of emotions, of conscious and unconscious phantasying, of dream thoughts etc. always within the context of an object-relational matrix. An attack on the linking process therefore – which Bion calls minus K – attempts to annul these integrative bindings, replacing them instead, by ‘misrecognition’, by ‘misinterpretation’, by ‘denudation of meaning’ and by intolerance towards doubt and flexibility that normally characterize abstract thinking. (Bion, 1962, 1963) The outcome is the establishment either of a totalitarian form of thinking, or – most commonly – of the establishment of lack of thinking whose aim is the lasting avoidance of psychic pain to be caused by any kind of thought. The alpha function which would, under more benign circumstances, transform perceptual stimuli coming both from within and from without, into proto-thoughts, has been permanently replaced by a distorting-the-psychic-truth function. With the loss of the (platonian) ‘learning from experience’²² principle, the psychic apparatus has been transformed into a quasi-robotic ‘thing’, without any capacity for critical thinking. The adjacent concept of ‘reversible perspective’ highlights how the

²² «παθόντα γινώσκει»

possibility of change through insight has been replaced by distorting changes in the meaning of the interventions from without, in order to achieve acquiescence with the already known. Such phenomena, where the Death Drive is directed inward and acts self-destructively, has been recognised by Bion as ‘the psychotic part of the personality’. As we have previously mentioned, Hannah Arendt who has observed it at the interpersonal level (i.e. when it is directed both inwards and outwards) has called it the shallowness or the banality of evil. Finally let us not overlook the fact that a similar condition has also been described by Freud regarding the man of the masses. The man of the masses renounces his critical thinking (his superego) and renders it to the leader, whilst at the same time relinquishing his differentiating subjectivity, thereby allowing himself to be surrounded not by ‘fellow men’ (*Nebenmenschen*) but by ‘doubles’ – a drop amongst innumerable indistinguishable other drops. Such a case of ‘voluntary servitude’ or self-castration, Masud Khan has called ‘passive will’^{23 24}, and has considered it a necessary element of perversion. (Khan, 1979) Others have talked of the transformation (through reaction formation) of a state of ‘passivity-distress’ into a state of ‘passivity-pleasure’. (Green, 1999a p.1589) Finally at the collective level again, the tendency towards *institutionalization* (i.e. the sacrificing of one’s subjectivity in favour of perceived collective needs and the submission to the leadership) is recognised as a central ongoing defense against fears of collapse and disintegration. (Turquet, 1975 p.136) The so-called Stockholm Syndrome appears to be a variation on this same theme. Ferenczi has years ago, given a very clear description of it. He has described the abuse scenario as an instance where the child expecting to be treated as a subject involved in intersubjective tenderness, finds itself being treated as a thing, from which pleasure/pathos is unilaterally derived for the benefit of the Other. The child then responds “*not by defence, but by anxiety-ridden identification and by introjection of the menacing person or aggressor.*” (Ferenczi,1933p.163)

Winnicott too, proffers some possible explanatory formulations when he talks of situations where “‘without mind’ becomes a desired state”. (Winnicott, 1949 p.247) He is referring to instances of spontaneous regression, where the psycho-soma is in search of dependence on a good-enough environment which, by simply providing the needed mind via *someone else*, will make self-reliance essentially redundant. It is extraordinary how a natural need for anaclitic relating, can – under certain circumstances – be so easily perverted to something so monstrous. A few years later, Donald Meltzer locates a similar state of mind in autism. He writes: “... it produces a genuine temporary *mindlessness* by dismantling the perceptual apparatus [and by the] suspension of attention.” (Meltzer, 1975 p.29)

One cannot help at this juncture but recall Kierkegaard’s notion of “*the teleological suspension of the ethical*” that he elaborates in his book *Fear and Trembling*. According to this notion, the only occasion where ethics can be

²³ Blind obedience / submission to one’s superior, which is considered a fundamental virtue of monastic life and is known by the latin phrase ‘*perinde ac cadaver*’ (*in the manner of a lifeless body*) must, in some ways, be a legitimization of this very dynamic. The Sufi concept of *fana’fi’llah* (being lifeless whilst alive in the presence of God) surprisingly makes use of the same metaphor. When this condition is not chosen but enforced, one ends up with states reminiscent of the ‘*musulmänner*’ in the concentration camps.

²⁴ Let us not forget Freud’s comment in the Three Essays that: *an instinct is always active even when it has a passive aim in view.*

temporarily set aside, and an unethical (i.e. evil) act acquire legitimisation, would be if the act is conceived of as a consequence or testing of a deep, unreserved faith and surrender to the goodness of God. Alternatively the faith in God is replaced either by faith in a False God – a usurper of God’s position – whose intentions cannot but be malign/perverse, or by an unquestioned belief in one’s own (egocentric) conviction of self-righteousness (an internal-object false God.)

The psychoanalytic situation is constantly on the threshold of such a danger.

André Green on his part, talks about the ‘dis-objectalising function’. He describes a condition where there is widespread nullification of the transformation of psychic functions to psychic objects, and consequently a fundamental disruption of object relating. He writes: “[it is] a process by which an object loses its specific individuality, its uniqueness for us, and becomes any object or no object at all ... it is the decahexis of objects external, internal or even transitional.” (Green, 1997 p.1083) If the objectalising function corresponds to meaning-giving investment, based on bindings and structuring, then the dis-objectalising function corresponds to unbinding, to dis-investment and to the annulment of object-relating, of parts of the ego, and of the very investment process itself. Differentiation and alterity have both totally disappeared. The obvious similarities with Wilfred Bion’s thinking really need not be elaborated any further here.

D) Complementary to the passive will mentioned above, active will for psychic sterilization (or according to some, imposed passivation) of the Other, is the sufficient and necessary condition for the establishment of perversion. If perversion is defined as “... *an activity of an autoerotic kind, conditional on disavowal of the status of a subject in the partner, who thereby becomes a quasi-thing which the subject manipulates at will and imbues with positive or negative qualities based on the subject’s own wishes.* ” (Pasche, 1983, p.400) it is not difficult to apperceive the very clear connection between perverse forms of relating and the functions we characterize as anti-Life Drive or Evil. Whereas the American psychoanalyst Robert Stoller, refers to perversion as the erotization of hatred (Stoller, 1975), the French analysts J. C. Racamier and F. Pasche insist that it is a special form of relating beyond the sexual arena, something involving the entirety of the personality. The intention of this form of relating is the enforcement of a form of domination and/or denial of castration, deemed necessary for the survival of the agent. The denial of every kind of loss, of every dependency need, and of every mourning process, results in the imperative necessity of discharging the internal tension through the instrumental use of an Other. What gets enacted is a relating not involving two subjects, but one subject relating to a de-humanized replaceable ‘thing’ who, by virtue of being in a position of an ‘instrument’ in the service of the phantasy of the first, contributes in its performance in actuality. A classical example of this, is the condition known as “Munchhausen by proxy”. F. Pasche writes: “... the pervert – in the sense of perversity not perversion – does not deny the existence of the Other’s psychic reality, on the contrary he needs it... in order to destroy it, to trash it, to crush it. The whole being of the Other is being targeted.” (Pasche, 1983 p.401) Various authors describe the perversely relating agent as:

- a) having a distinct inability to phantasize and so therefore needing to live out his every phantasy in the realm of raw action instead (Racamier, 2014),

- b) having a dearth of dreaming/dream thoughts, forcing him to make use of the ‘technique of intimacy’ rather than intimacy proper (Khan, 1979),
 - c) having only concrete dreams i.e. an impoverishment of symbolization (Herring,1997),
 - d) involved in the double movement of depersonalizing the Other and using him as an extension of the self in an attempt to avoid intimacy with alterity, which has as a very dire cost, the eventual depersonalization of any given agent from his own self (Khan, 1979, Chasseguet Smirgel, 1989),
 - e) engaging in relationships characterized by a mode of experience where instrumentality (viz. Horkheimer above) and reification of the Other are prevalent, i.e. it is not only the object and the body, but where even the mind is deemed an inanimate object, (Dermen, 2010 p. 667-70)
 - f) relating in ways that are imbued by the need for absolute mastery over the Other which can only be achieved through the Other’s humiliation and psychic denudation(Parsons,2000),
 - g) involved in modes of engagement whose aim is intensely defensive and functions through the creation of a *zone of no-contact with the Other’s subjectivity* out of fear at the possibility of the emergence in the pervert, of annihilating-fusion-anxiety(Pasche,1983,p.398),
 - h) interacting in ways that necessitate the instillation of doubt in the Other’s fundamental ethical principles, something that gradually erodes the basic differences between good and bad, between truth and falsity, between love and intimacy on the one hand, and exploitation on the other.
- E) Just like in the 2009 movie *Dogtooth*, when there is no external point of reference, even abuse cannot be recognized as such²⁵. The aim is not a connecting with living, but a disconnecting, a way for the infinite, that which is no longer living.
- F) Infinity that is no longer living, orients us towards narcissism (what Kant calls self-love) which according to most authors stands at the basis of all anti-life forces, and of evil. Just as in narcissism proper, we expect to find signs of embellishment, indeed idealization of the self and its powers (omniscience, omnipotence etc.) equally, under special circumstances, it is the destructive forces and qualities of the self that are idealized. It is them that are thought of as sources of power and superiority. This conviction must, from that point on, be preserved at all cost, so therefore special organizations having gang-like qualities are constructed, and they become expert at resisting any change or development. They do that by destroying anything which, by evoking need or dependence could possibly trigger feelings of envy. Any such object is immediately devalued, so no possibility of a threatening anaclitic relating is ever allowed to arise. This psychic condition emerging from the functioning of envy, as the manifestation of the Death Drive, has been called by Herbert Rosenfeld, ‘Destructive Narcissism’ or ‘Malignant Narcissism’. It is worth noting, that it coincides, to the letter, with André Green’s concept of ‘Death Narcissism’. Both Rosenfeld and Green resonate with the philosophers who locate the roots of these phenomena in extreme self-

²⁵ It presents itself as an extreme example of Nietzsche’s provocative assertion that quite rightly “.... do [the Sophists] posit as primary truth that a 'morality in itself,' a 'good in itself,' does not exist, that to talk of 'truth' in this sphere is a swindle. [Sie [die Sophisten] stellen die erste Wahrheit hin, dass “eine Moral an sich”, ein “Gutes an sich” nicht existiert, dass es Schwindel ist, von “Wahrheit” auf diesem Gebiete zu reden. (KGW VIII-3.84)]”

complacency as the most powerful defense against delimitation (castration).

- G) Finally, let us not neglect to mention, the significant portion of the psychoanalytic community who do not recognize the Death Drive as an autonomous entity. These thinkers tend to consider occurrences of aggression and destruction only as reactions to traumata, of varying of quality and subjective meaning. Major representatives of this group are amongst others, Kohut and Winnicott. They put forward a vital force (which they call primitive love or natural narcissism) which operates in a ‘*ruthless*’ manner (Winnicott suggests) and which acquires aggressive or destructive intentions only as a result of a threat or a major frustration²⁶. Just like for Nietzsche, so too for Kohut and Winnicott and their followers, aggressiveness (or evil) is always a re-action, never a primary action. (Winnicott 1989 p. 454) It is Stoller who first emphasized that perversion – irrespective of its drive dimension (viz. Freud & Klein) – should be conceptualized as the vengeful discharge upon a victim, of the de-humanizing experience the agent himself had experienced, at some point in the past. (Stoller, 1975) Bollas (as a true Winnicottian) describes the evil act as a concrete attempt at getting some kind of mastery over the psychic murder the agents themselves had once been subjected. Referring to the intentions of the profoundly narcissistic agent, Christopher Bollas writes: “a *killed* self seems to go on ‘living’ by transforming other selves into similarly killed ones, establishing a companionship of the dead . . . in place of a once-live self, a new being emerges, identified with the killing of what is good, the destruction of trust, love and reparation.” (Bollas, 1995 p. 189)
- H) Finally the French psychosomatician Pierre Marty, strangely concurring with the monistic Augustinian views mentioned above, suggests that in psychosomatic conditions, the anti-life / destructive movements do not emerge from an autonomous instinctual force, but from a very serious weakening of the existing Life Drive !

In Conclusion

The affinities between the views of theologians, philosophers and psychoanalysts, has I believe, been duly made apparent. Irrespective of whether it is about its innate or reactive origins, its anti-life dehumanizing character or the possibility of new growth that stems from destruction (negation as a precondition for synthesis), the satisfaction that transgression of the law promises, or indeed the free-will, i.e. the responsibility dimension that infuses it, the views tend to resonate. The signifier may be different in these two languages but the signified rests the same. As Bion would put it, it is but a matter of transformations regarding invariants. And it is precisely for this reason that the provocative statement by André Green that *psychoanalysts are ill equipped to talk about evil ... since lovers of evil never make it to their couch*, (Green, 1988 p.256) sounds so much like an oxymoron.

I would like to end with the lyrics from a song by the Australian songwriter Jesse Younan:

²⁶ In the philosophers’ language “[t]he world is motivationally inert...” (McDowell, 1998 p. 83)

There's your picture on the wall
 I took it long before I knew you
 The little dress that you've got on
 That look upon your face
 That's a look I'm forever chasing

Take something beautiful and then go and smash it
 Take something perfect and pervert it
 Take something young and proud and then shame it
 Make a promise out loud and then break it.

References

- Alford, C. F. (1997) *What Evil Means to Us*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Arendt, H. (2000) *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Peter Baehr (Ed.) New York: Penguin Books.
- Bell, D. (2015) The Death Drive: Phenomenological perspectives in contemporary Kleinian theory. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 96: 411-423.
- Bion, W. (1962) *Learning From Experience*. London: Karnac.
- Bion, W. (1963) *Elements of Psycho-analysis*. London: Karnac.
- Bion, W. (1977) *Two Papers: The Grid and Caesura*. London: Karnac.
- Bodman, W. (2011) *The Poetics of Iblis*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Bollas, C. (1989) *Forces of Destiny*. London: Free Association Books.
- Bollas, C. (1992) *Being a Character*. London: Routledge.
- Bollas, C. (1995) *Cracking up* London: Routledge.
- Braunshweig, D. & Fain, M. (1971) *Eros et Anteros* Paris: Payot.
- Chasseguet Smirgel, J. (1989) *Sexuality and Mind*. London: Karnac (1986)
- Dermen, S. (2010) Endings and Beginnings. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 74: 665-685
- Dostoevsky, F. (1963) *The Brothers Karamazov*. London: Penguin Books.
- Ferenczi, S. (1933) Confusion of Tongues Between Adults and the Child. In *Final Contributions to the Problems & Methods of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Karnac (1994).
- Freud, S. (1924) Das Ökonomische Problem des Masochismus. *G. W.* 13: 371-383.
- Freud, S. (1930) Das Unbehagen in der Kultur. *G. W.* 14: 421-506.
- Freud, S. (1938) Abriss der Psychanalyse. *G. W.* 17: 64-138.
- Green, A. (1981) Negation and Contradiction In J. Grotstein (Ed.) *Do I Dare Disturb the Universe ?* London: Caesura Press.
- Green, A. (1988) Pourquoi le Mal? *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*. 38 : 239-261
- Green, A. (1997) Intuition of the Negative in Playing and Reality. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 78: 1071-
- Green, A. (1999a) Passivité-passivation: jouissance et détresse. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* 63: 1587-1600.
- Green, A. (1999b) *The Work of the Negative*. London: Free Association Books.
- Hegel, G. (2013) *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Berlin: Edition Holzinger.
- Herring, C. (1997) Beyond Understanding. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*. 14: 209-220.
- Hobbes, T. (1651) *Leviathan* London: Wordsworth (2014).
- Horkheimer, M. (1967) *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.
- Horkheimer, M. & Adorno, T. (1969) *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer.
- Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups, Politics Number 89, Fall 2023*

- Kant, E. (1990) *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag. Initially published in 1793.
- Khan, M. (1979) *Alienation in Perversion*. London : The Hogarth Press.
- Lacan, J. (1977) *Écrits*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Levinas, E. (1978) Transcendence et Mal. *Le Nouveau Commerce* 41: 55-75.
- Loewald, H. (1987) Sublimation. In *The Essential Loewald*. Hagerstown, Md. : University Publishing Group (2000).
- Marty, P.(1967) Régression et Instinct de Mort. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*. 31:1113-26.
- McDowell, J. (1998) *Mind, Value and Reality* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Meltzer, D. et. al.(Eds.) (1975) *Explorations in Autism*. London: Clunie Press.
- Pagels, E. (1989) *The Gnostic Gospels*. NY: Vintage Books.
- Parsons, M. (2000) Sexuality and Perversion. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 81 :37-49.
- Pasche, F. (1983) Définir la Perversion. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* 47: 396-402.
- Penot, B. (2017)The So-called Death Drive. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 98:299-321.
- Poland, W. (2000) The Analyst's Witnessing and Otherness. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 48: 17-34.
- Racamier, P-C. (2014) On Narcissistic Perversion. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 95:119-32.
- Scarry, E. (1985) *The Body in Pain*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stoller, R. (1986) *Perversion, The Erotic Form of Hatred*. London : Karnac (1975).
- Turquet, P. (1975) Threats to identity in the large group. In L. Kreeger (Ed.) *The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy*. London: Constable.
- Weil, S. (1940) *L'Iliade ou le Poème de la Force*. Marseilles : Les Cahiers du Sud.
- Williams, B. (1993) Pagan Justice and Christian Love. In *The Sense of the Past*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (2006).
- Winnicott, D. (1949) Mind and its Relation to the Psyche-Some. In *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*. 243-254. London: Hogarth Press (1958).

Chris Joannidis is a psychoanalyst. He is a Fellow of the British Psycho-Analytical Society and a Training Analyst of the Hellenic Psychoanalytical Society, as well as being a Full Member of the Group Analytic Society (International). Having held the post of Consultant Psychiatrist in Psychotherapy in St. Albans, Herts. for many years, he is now in full private practice in Athens Greece.