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Jung and the Objective Psyche as the Locus of Evil

Abstract: In the present paper we propose a discussion on the problem of evil in the writings of Carl Gustav Jung, proceeding from two major objectives: (1) to present several perspectives on the problem of evil characteristic of the medieval philosophical tradition to which Jung himself appeals to (though not exclusively); and (2) to examine in detail the manner in which Jung relates to evil and, more precisely, to the origins of the problem of evil. Accordingly, the central thesis of this study is to justify that what Jung proposes is a hermeneutical alternative to the problem of evil and by no means a definitive solution to it, insofar as he does not provide a conclusive resolution himself. Instead, Jung concentrates his attention upon the question of the origin of evil, maintaining, contrary to certain Christian thinkers, that evil possesses an ontological character, which is to say that it may be conceived as substance. The findings of the hereby research highlight the fact that Jung's theses concerning the problem of evil do not culminate in the formulation of a final solution, but rather situate the manifestation of evil within the objective psyche. The conclusions, together with the implications of our study, draw attention not to the impossibility of a definitive solution to the problem of evil, but to the fact that an adequate understanding of this problem may safeguard us against the perpetration of evil.

Keywords: evil, Jung, objective psyche, the problem of evil.

1. Introduction

The problem of evil has long been a source of intellectual temptation in general, though it has proven especially tantalising for philosophical and theological reflection. It is beyond doubt that, throughout the history of ideas, proposed solutions to this problem have continued to emerge without interruption. For example, Andrei Pleșu (2023, 124–134) identifies six such solutions: (1) the aesthetic solution, (2) the didactic solution, (3) the solution of free will, (4) the theological solution of illusory evil, (5) the sacramental solution, and (6) the preventive solution. General solutions, therefore, are by no means lacking, even if evil itself continually adapts to the passage of time. Evil persists in the world beyond death, beyond

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political, economic, and ideological upheavals, and beyond every technological revolution.

In other words, the presence of evil cannot be fundamentally eradicated. For this reason, in the present paper we propose a discussion on the thesis of the substantiality of evil in Carl Gustav Jung's thought, and we shall attempt to justify the fact that, regardless of the perspective from which we approach the problem of evil, substantialist or non-substantialist, this is nothing more than a discussion concerning evil and not an effacement of it. Our thesis, therefore, will be addressed from the perspective of its two objectives: (1) the presentation of several assessments concerning the problem of evil, characteristic of the medieval philosophical tradition of which we have mentioned; and (2) the detailed examination of the manner in which Jung relates to evil and, more precisely, to the origins of the problem of evil. In short, Jung leaves the reader with the impression that understanding the origin of evil implicitly leads to its remediation, for which reason another aim of this study will consist precisely in justifying the contrary, and the space of its manifestation, or "dwelling", of evil, is the objective psyche.

Subjecting the formulated thesis to any philosophical reflection requires, on the one hand, certain methodological precautions: in what follows, the theological issues pertaining to this discussion concern us only insofar as Jung himself debated or contested them, and strictly from a philosophical point of view; on the other hand, given that we are dealing with certain delicate and at times subtle opinions, we shall approach the matters proposed through a hermeneutical analysis of the concepts and perspectives involved. Moreover, since Jungian discourse situates itself both at the intersection of several discursive universes and in opposition to them, a phenomenological description of the concepts to be discussed proves particularly suited to the present inquiry.

2. Medieval Philosophy on the Problem of Evil

Peter Homans (1969, 346) notes that, in his attempt to understand the aspects of self-understanding, Jung came to address the problem of evil from ethical, theological, and religious points of view. Precisely in order to understand this undertaking, it is necessary to follow his line of thought, that is, to bring into discussion in this section several perspectives on the problem of evil. Thus, *Unde malum?* is the question toward which philosophy has directed itself from Antiquity up to the present. Whether we invoke names such as Plato or Agamben, for instance, we observe that evil is a problem which does not lose its significance within philosophical writings. *Unde malum?* concerns, in essence, the provenance of evil, thus becoming an ontological problem with an interrogative status, one which

transcends the mere (sensible) knowledge of evil. In other words, *Unde malum?* implicitly contains the problem of the origin of evil.

In this respect, we briefly present several impressions concerning the origin of evil, necessary for the present study. Thus, certain authors consider that evil proceeds: 1) from free will (and therefore not from God), namely from the freedom that God bestowed upon man, but which man employed in an erroneous manner (Augustine 2004, 17–21; Plantinga 1977, 30); 2) from corrupt nature—evil being a corruption, and corrupted nature being evil (Augustine 2004, 19–20); 3) from matter that is entirely deprived of the good (Plotinus 2003, 217); or 4) from the primordial imperfection of creation (Leibniz 1997, 100).

Likewise, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (2018, 137) maintains that evil proceeds neither from within God nor from God—a hypothesis predominant in medieval thought in general, since He “is the cause of all that exists, for everything that exists is good” (Vlad 2018, 294). Therefore, evil cannot proceed from the good (Pseudo-Dionysius 2018, 127), but rather from “multiple and partial deficiencies” (Pseudo-Dionysius 2018, 147). In other words, according to Pseudo-Dionysius (2018, 149), evil exists by accident and does not proceed from the “proper principle”. Evil is therefore “an incompleteness and a failure of the proper good bestowed by God upon every being” (Vlad 2018, 294). Regardless of the manner in which these considerations concerning the origin of evil are formulated, it is certain that theological-philosophical writings abound in notions according to which evil does not exist as essence, as an originating factor, as form, nor as an independent entity, but represents only an absence of the good (Aquinas 1997, 248), a privation of the good (Aquinas 1997, 243), an imperfect good (Pseudo-Dionysius 2018, 145), a corruption of measure, order, and natural form, a diminished good (Augustine 2004, 19), a privation and therefore not a form (Plotinus 2003, 209), and not a *substance*—aspects which we shall detail below. Certainly, the absence of evil from the divine “nature” and the absolute goodness of God, on the basis of which He endows man with complete freedom, constitutes the principal foundation underlying the establishment of Christian dogma.

Other authors, including Jung as well, conversely argue that evil proceeds, alongside the good, from God. A position which leads both to the negation of the privative nature of evil as *privatio* and to the annulment of the individual’s freedom of will. In short, according to Jung (2005, 53), evil exists autonomously as the opposite of good and as a substance. Thus, the substance of evil, of the devil, which is the very negative spiritual substance itself (Jung 2014, 242), originates in an ambivalent divine nature. Consequently, by asserting the substantiality of evil, *privatio boni*, in the Christian understanding of a diminution of the good, undergoes a process of resignification in the Jungian sense, thereby becoming an illusory principle. Likewise, free will itself bears an illusory character, for, evil having

substance, the individual can no longer be absolutely free. Nonetheless, Jung considers that evil, or rather the recognition of evil as a substance within human nature, constitutes a necessity in the attempt at achieving totality.

We observe, therefore, on the basis of these two perspectives, that of the Christian philosophers and that of Jung, that the problem of the origin of evil imposes two antinomial hypotheses: 1) evil does not proceed from God; and 2) evil proceeds from God. Both of which also involve the problem of the objective nature of evil, of its substantiality, for we cannot philosophically approach evil independently of its ontological dimension. Thus, unfolding along the lines of substantiality or non-substantiality, we clearly deduce that if evil does not proceed from God, then evil has no substance, whereas if evil has its origin in the divine nature, then it possesses substance.

The paradigm of the non-substantiality of evil branches off into two hypotheses: that evil is a *privatio boni*, and that evil depends upon free will. The hypothesis concerning the lack of substance of evil is defined, as we have already noted, through the assertion that evil proceeds neither from nor through God, with it being merely an absence, a deprivation of the good—a *privatio boni*. Anticipated by Origen and Basil the Great, who maintain that evil stems from a “mutilation of the soul” (Jung 2005, 60), the concept of *privatio boni* gained considerable momentum throughout the Middle Ages and left an unmistakable mark in Dionysian, Thomistic, and, most notably, Augustinian thought. On the other hand, evil depends upon human will, and therefore upon the individual's freedom to choose whether or not to commit evil. Evil is thus ascribed to fallen man, to a nature capable of corruption. In this regard, we recall Augustine's (2004, 21) statement according to which all nature is corruptible and does not proceed from God, who is the supreme good, and therefore incorruptible.

Regardless of the manner in which thinkers relate to God's goodness and to free will, it becomes evident from the Augustinian paradigm that the source of evil in man is the (initial) free will itself, misused by him. Fundamentally, God bestowed freedom upon man out of *love*, for the purpose of the latter's participation in *theosis* (Lossky 1993, 34). Man can attain *theosis*—that is, he can be in the image, or likeness, of God—only through a free, unhindered act (Lossky 1993, 34). Evil, therefore, is not an intrinsically divine principle, but one external to God, pertaining to the individual's freedom of choice. In other words, after the first freedom was wrongfully exercised by Adam, he received, out of God's benevolence, a second freedom as well, namely earthly freedom, which derives from the first both as its preservation and as the possibility of its restoration. This second freedom is, in essence, still the first freedom, though deprived of the “phenomenon” of the Fall.

Consequently, evil is neither nature, nor being or existence, but a non-being and an absence of the good, a privation thereof, a diminished good, an imperfect good, and a corruptible nature. As Pseudo-Dionysius (2018, 149) affirms in a Neoplatonic fashion, evil is not a reality, but a “para-reality”, as it exists through the prism of another reality (Vlad 2018, 298), namely that of the good. Evil is therefore “a weakness and a deficiency of the good” (Pseudo-Dionysius 2018, 149), a phenomenon which parasitises the good (Vlad 2018, 298), since “all things exist for the sake of the good: both the good and their contraries” (Pseudo-Dionysius 2018, 149). In other words, all things aspire towards the good, that is, towards their intrinsic nature, towards likeness to God, evil being “anything that distances man from God and from his divine becoming—the theosis to which he is called to by his very nature” (Larchet 2006, 35). What does this estrangement from God entail? Living in sin. Through sin, man distances himself from God and lives in a state contrary to his being, as Pseudo-Dionysius also maintains (Larchet 2006, 36), contrary to his “good” nature. Put differently, through sin, man separates himself from God and lives in discordance with his ultimate purpose, which is theosis. In short, evil as a lack of substance is (also) an expression of the freedom with which man has been endowed with. Nonetheless, this freedom does not possess non-directional attributes, but is oriented towards an end, towards the unconstrained choice of a relationship with God, of theosis, in view of attaining perfection, of nature itself. In other words, the purpose of freedom is constructed upon a necessity, namely upon man’s necessity or need to become like God, for only in this manner does man live in union with his own (good) nature and in accordance with the ultimate end, which is the good—towards which everything that exists tends, since the good is the only real existence, the sole being and entity.

3. Jung and the Thesis of the Substantiality of Evil

Influenced by Gnostic, Buddhist, Hindu, and especially alchemical doctrines, Jung champions the idea according to which evil possesses substance. A perspective through which he places himself in direct contradiction to the theological-philosophical conceptions of *privatio boni* and free will. In other words, by asserting the substantiality of evil, largely influenced by Gnostic mythology, Jung “deconstructs” the argument of the privation of the good characteristic of Christian philosophy. Moreover, maintaining the ontological character of evil (its substantiality) and the psychologization of Christian doctrines in a mythological-Gnostic and alchemical manner both constitute a “revolutionary” perspective within the marketplace of ideas of abyssal psychology.

One of the most important writings on the subject of the substantiality of evil is the essay *Answer to Job*, in which one may discern the author’s

Jewish influences. In his debate on the problem of evil, Jung opts for the more ambivalent figure of the Old Testament God. More precisely, *Answer to Job* is the work in which he explicitly introduces his psychological “creed”: evil possesses substance. Furthermore, he also asserts the presence of the ambivalence within the Three Persons of the New Testament Trinity as well. Returning to the study on Job, we observe that Jung approaches evil as originating within the divine structure itself, with the latter exhibiting a contradictory, ambivalent nature composed of both that of good and evil (Jung 2010, 398). Granted, in order to address the issue of Yahweh’s ambivalence—who is not divided, but is rather an antinomy (Jung 2010, 398)—he makes use of passages from the Old Testament *Book of Job*, which he considers brings to the forefront the image of a susceptible, jealous, and wrathful God, who punishes Job out of a desire to secure His supremacy in relation to creation. Thus, the relationship of the “old” God with man is not one consisting of love (for mankind), but rather a relationship based upon the praise and glorification of divinity. Yahweh’s ambivalent conduct clearly portrays the existence of a wrathful (shadow-like) side, which corresponds to His unconscious state, above which rises Job’s state of consciousness. By virtue of his own consciousness, Job not only notices the contradiction within the divine nature (to which he nevertheless faithfully submits), but also possesses the capacity to become aware of the existing differences within the man-God relationship.

What, then, is the cause of God's inferior consciousness and His wrath? Forgetting of the pleromic coexistence with Sophia (Jung 2010, 424), which, in *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, calls itself the Logos, the Word of God. More precisely, Jung asserts that because of His jealous dimension, Yahweh forgets His coexistence with Wisdom and establishes instead a perfectionistic relationship with the people of Israel, whose faithfulness He diligently monitors, while behaving toward them like a jealous husband (Jung 2010, 425). Likewise, according to the Jungian perspective, God's relationship with man is not based on *eros*, but is a relationship that is utilitarian to Yahweh himself (Jung 2010, 425). This lack of love towards human beings is also evident from the fact that Yahweh, influenced by one of His two sons, namely Satan, does not seek the cause of this contamination with evil in Satan, but rather in those men who refuse to obey Him (Jung 2010, 424). Hence, Yahweh consults His self-reflection and resolves to become human (Jung 2010, 435). In other words, until the reemergence of Sophia, Yahweh’s actions are guided both by an inferior consciousness, devoid of self-reflection and morality, and by a failure to acknowledge His own omniscience (Jung 2010, 433). Yahweh’s inferior consciousness is what philosophy terms “perceptive consciousness” (Jung 2010, 433). Nevertheless, Jung does not deny, in his analysis of the Yahweh–Job relationship, the existence of an apperceptive consciousness of

the Old Testament God, but instead proposes its lapse into forgetfulness due to the divine nature's jealousy and eagerness for praise.

Christ establishes the distinction between the state of consciousness and the state of unconsciousness, the former being essential with regard to the salvation of man. Christ is the saviour who protects the whole of mankind from the loss of man's relationship with God and of man's relationship with himself through an exclusive deepening into the sphere of consciousness (Jung 2010, 459). In other words, man can maintain himself in the state of "selfhood", as opposed to that of self-loss, by accepting and becoming aware of the unconscious or archetypal manifestations that occur within the human psyche. Otherwise, their repression inevitably leads the human being toward a "loss of self" and a "dissociation between consciousness and the unconscious" (Jung 2010, 459). Christ is, therefore, a mediator in man's relationship with God and the unifier of extremes, of contraries, of opposites, for He embodies both a human and (above all) a divine nature. For this reason, symbols of wholeness and totality are commonly attributed to Christ (Jung 2010, 460).

The continuous incarnation of God after the Ascension is made possible through the Holy Spirit, who dwells and labours within man in order to remind him of Christ's teachings and to guide him toward clarity, toward consciousness (Jung 2010, 463). Referring to the manner in which Jung relates to the Holy Spirit, Robert Avens asserts that the author spoke of this Third Person of the Trinity in historical terms by assigning to Him an epoch. Consequently, the Holy Spirit does not represent a metaphysical entity per se, but the epoch succeeding the Jewish epoch of the Father and the Christian epoch of the Son (Avens 1977, 214). Avens further claims that the successive incarnation of God in man, accomplished by means of the Holy Spirit, transforms human beings into "joint-heirs with Christ", into God-men (Avens 1977, 214).

Accordingly, from a Jungian perspective, the devil is a psychological reality of evil (Jung 2010, 190). We know that according to Gnosticism, the devil is both the shadow with which Christ was born and one of the Sons of God, from whom He separated Himself upon the Incarnation. All these arguments employed by Jung endow the devil, and thus evil, with a substantial character. If he does not originate directly from the Father, the devil is attributed to Christ. In any case, both conceptions being as detrimental to Christianity as they are beneficial to Jungianism, insofar as they serve the purpose of demonstrating the substantial character of evil.

We note that Jung presents a vision entirely opposed to that of the medieval philosophers, who reject the idea of the substantiality of evil, considering it a mere *privatio boni*, a privation of the good. Thus, by affirming and maintaining that evil is a substance, the author distances himself from the idea of *privatio boni* upheld by the Christian philosophers, according to which evil cannot possess any substantial character. By

examining the dual nature of God, namely the presence of evil within His dual structure, Jung denies Him the attribute of *summum bonum* so fiercely defended by medieval theological-philosophical thought.

In *Answer to Job*, Jung asserts the dual nature—wrathful and loving—of God, who thereby loses His character as *summum bonum*, upheld especially by the Thomistic paradigm. With this, he draws attention to the incompatibility that comes to light between what the Church maintains regarding God (and implicitly concerning the origin of evil) and the image of God offered by the scriptures of the Old Testament. In other words, the incompatibility arises between the goodness of God as affirmed by the Church—God is *summum bonum*, while evil is a *privatio boni*—and the antinomic image of the Old Testament God, Yahweh (Jung 2010, 458). Thus, according to Jung, God is not the supreme good, nor does evil represent a deprivation or diminution of the good, since evil is present within Yahweh’s dual nature, for which reason evil is a substance just as the good is. For him, evil originates in the divine dual nature itself. Consequently, the Jungian vision regarding the origin of evil is one that stands in opposition to Christian philosophical thought.

The affirmation of the origin of evil within the divine nature makes Jung both a heretical thinker, as he would be branded by theological circles, and a “psychological metaphysician”, since he approaches religious ideas from an exclusively psychological angle. The psychological explanations that Jung provides to dogmatic (numinous, archetypal) ideas are formulated through observations on the manner in which certain religious contents (archetypes) manifest themselves or appear within the collective unconscious, for which reason Jung proclaims himself an empirical psychologist. Within his analytical psychology, Jung applies his own psychological concepts onto a religious conceptual framework in order to ground his archetypal system of thought, which does not necessarily mean that the author makes any assertions concerning faith itself, as Jung himself insists in his defence. In this respect, our understanding of Jung’s analytical psychology has been formulated rather in the direction of an attempt undertaken by him toward the psychologization of religion.

On a different note, Jung (2010, 445) argues that, since God is not absolutely good, neither would the autonomy that man might manifest by virtue of the freedom of will granted by this ambivalent Creator be one with beneficial effects. In any case, with the assertion of the substantiality of evil, it acquires an ontological character, while the Christian dilemma of free will, respectively that of the original sin, becomes null. Whereas according to Augustine evil emerged as a consequence of the freedom of will that God bestowed upon man, but which man later misused, according to Jung evil originates in the dual nature of divinity. Therefore, the Christian hypothesis of the original sin can no longer be attributed to man, given that he is created with a predisposition toward evil, in the image of God. Put

differently, as a telluric expression of the ambivalent Creator, a likeness of the divine image, Jungianly speaking, man but possesses His characteristics.

Fundamentally, in Jung's thought, the human being does not possess freedom of will in an authentic manner, since the human psyche contains, alongside conscious data, unconscious, archetypal data as well, which become active and influence the psychic life of the individual beyond his conscious will to resist. For the purpose of clarity, we may recall Jung's explanation concerning the Ego–Self relationship, in which the Ego is subordinated to the Self, the latter being an objective (unconscious) datum with regard to which human freedom of will cannot alter anything (Jung 2005, 13). We observe, therefore, that human will pertains to consciousness, for which reason it is not absolutely free, since the Ego, the centre of consciousness, is subordinated to the archetype. Within the Jungian paradigm, the hypothesis of free will is annulled through the very affirmation of evil within the divine structure. Free will loses its status as a “moral” intermediary between man and God. In fact, free will does not even exist from a psychological point of view. In Jungian terms, that is, by admitting the existence of evil in an originary manner, free will would be absent from divine intentionality.

Thus, Jung considers that the individual does not possess freedom of will properly speaking, because he does not act on exclusively conscious grounds, but rather he is dominated in his actions by unconscious forces which Jung terms archetypes. The Jungian perspective on will, insofar as it pertains to consciousness, confers upon the former an illusory character. Freedom of will, in Jungian thought, is overtaken, hijacked, by the unconscious, thereby losing its autonomy and its capacity to exist as will in and of itself. More precisely, the individual does not possess genuine freedom of will, since he is “manipulated” by unconscious agents, which manifest themselves through an originary-ambivalent energy. Man contains within potency both good and evil, while every effort to struggle against evil through freedom of will remains at the “discretion” of archetypal manifestations. Man commits evil beyond his own will not to perpetrate it, but due to the fact that he is an ambivalent creation, resembling the primordial model, that is the ambivalent God. Like Yahweh, the individual does not have the possibility of attaining totality, or *theosis*, unless he perpetually achieves a reconciliation of good and evil—both originary dimensions historically rooted in Yahweh's very own nature.

4. Conclusions and Implications

With the assertion that evil is a substance proceeding from the ambivalent divine nature, Jung annihilates three fundamental ideas of Christianity: that evil is *privatio boni*, that evil pertains to human freedom, and that the original sin is the product of human freedom of choice. For

Jung, evil possesses an ontological character as the (dark) part of a synthesis of the psychological Self, which is a *complexio oppositorum* and an archetype of totality. Even so, the fact that Jung supports the thesis of the substantiality of evil does not make him either an adherent or a theorist of Manichaeism, nor a proponent of the thesis of the independence of evil (Stein 1996, 7), since the psychoanalyst does not refer to the concepts of good and evil as a radically disparate "duality", but rather as two dimensions united within the structure of the same totalizing psychological entity—the Self. In other words, evil does not exist independently of the good, but coexists alongside it inside the Self, the archetype of unity and *complexio oppositorum* par excellence (Jung 2005, 75). More precisely, according to Jungian interpretations, good and evil are a *complexio oppositorum*, and a *coincidentia oppositorum*, which unite inside the Self, in which case one may speak, within the economy of Jung's body of works, of a union of opposites, of good and evil as opposing aspects that originate in the very antinomic nature of the divine itself.

In this train of thought, it is important to emphasize the fact that, irrespective of paradigm, whether substantialist or non-substantialist, evil manifests itself in everyday life. The question concerning its origin therefore demands our attention, although this represents an insufficient, albeit necessary, prerequisite for the eradication of evil. Certainly, the thesis proposed in the introduction of this study has been justified, and, ultimately, understanding the problem of evil does not exempt us from committing it, intentionally or unintentionally.

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