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Evil in Human Nature – Bogusław Wolniewicz on the Root of Evil*

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to reconstruct Bogusław Wolniewicz's position on evil and its source. In pointing to the origins of evil, Wolniewicz refers to a very old concept of the devil. Namely, some cosmic force of unknown genesis that acts in man and through man. In philosopher's opinion, human nature has an inner inclination to do evil. He therefore acknowledges the existence of evil in an anthropological dimension – as an innate and permanent human tendency to behave wrongly in a moral sense.

Keywords: evil, devil, Wolniewicz, human nature

The problem of evil caused by man has intrigued philosophers, theologians, writers and artists for centuries. Bogusław Wolniewicz,¹ Polish philoso-

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¹ Bogusław Wolniewicz (1927–2017), Polish philosopher, a respected logician, the creator of a system of ontology of situations, eminent expert on Wittgenstein's philosophy.

pher, also seems to be genuinely concerned about the sources of evil in human nature. His views deserve special attention in our world, in which the relativisation of values is intensifying and moral confusion is growing, and very often the philosopher points to moral problems that are passed over in silence by the general public as inconvenient and by intellectuals as politically incorrect. For example, he considers transplantation of organs to be an immoral medical activity and bluntly describes it as “modern-day cannibalism”.² On the issue of evil, on the other hand, which is the subject of this article, Wolniewicz emphasises the existence of an objective difference between good and evil, something that is rare nowadays, in times of dominant utilitarianism.³

Wolniewicz’s conclusions on the origins of evil are consistent with his understanding of human nature, which allows for a better understanding of it. Wolniewicz argues that human character is innate. In his view, the findings of modern biology clearly point to a strong genetic determination of man in his entire physical and spiritual constitution. The philosopher considers that character, as the orientation of the will to do good or evil, is already determined in a human embryo and will be manifested in the future acts of a particular individual. According to the philosopher, human actions are – from the ethical point of view – good, bad or morally neutral, and at the same time the character of a human being manifests itself in her/his behaviour.⁴ In Wolniewicz’s view, the basis of ethics is conscience, and the basis of conscience is character. Character determines conscience.⁵ If a person’s will directs him to act morally, this is equivalent to that person having a good character. If, on the other hand, a man’s will directs him to act immorally, contrary

² Bogusław Wolniewicz, *Filozofia i wartości*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 1998), 298–315. In the following footnotes this edition will be referred to as FiW, indicating the volume – 1, 2, or 3, and pages). Wolniewicz considers transplantations to be such a practice that overturns our value system. This opinion of Wolniewicz is widely perceived as appalling; however, he admits that he is not calling for an end to the practice, but for a discussion on the immoral dimension of organ transplantation, which is completely overlooked.

³ *Ibidem*, 204.

⁴ FiW 3, 163. See also Bogusław Wolniewicz, “Meliorizm contra pejoryzm”, *Edukacja Filozoficzna* 47 (2009): 31.

⁵ *Ibidem*: 26.

to his intellectual recognition of what is moral, it means that this man has bad character.⁶ Thus, Wolniewicz equates the existence of evil in the anthropological dimension with the innate and enduring tendency of some people to behave in morally wrong ways.

To the text to which Wolniewicz devoted the issue of evil and its relation to human nature he conferred the characteristic title: “Epifania diabła” (devil’s epiphany).⁷ In the paper, Wolniewicz admits that this is only a preliminary sketch of the problem, far from even a satisfactory solution, let alone a full explanation.

In the article of interest here, Wolniewicz distinguishes between spiritual evil and physical evil. The latter is suffering, while spiritual evil can be “ordinary” evil, i.e. lack of good will, insensitivity towards someone else’s suffering, or “diabolical” evil, which is the presence of bad will that manifests itself in joy at someone else’s suffering. Both types of evil are present in man in different proportions. Spiritual evil is a certain cosmic force that existed in the universe even before *Homo sapiens*’ appearance as an opportunity to use evil. It was realised in man and it is through our species that “devil” manifests.⁸

Wolniewicz writes:

Physical evil, conceived as suffering, is present throughout the sentient world. It is experienced equally by man, a dog and a rat. Yet spiritual evil, the enjoyment of another’s suffering, is a human particularity. It does not exist in animals. For two thousand years Christianity has been preaching the great doctrine of the corruption of human nature by original sin. This sin is precisely a predilection for evil, a delight in it. Everyone is charged with original sin, so everyone has a predisposition to evil, although not everyone to the same degree. The evil in man is bad

⁶ Bogusław Wolniewicz, “Hedonizm i obowiązek. Część II”, *Edukacja Filozoficzna* 43 (2007): 9–11.

⁷ This essay was included in *FiW* 1, 208–223. The paper dates from 1992 and had not been previously published. Wolniewicz repeated the most important theses in an interview “Diabeł, czyli miłość zła” (devil, or love of evil) given to the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* of 2–3 July 1994; reprinted in: *FiW* 2, 295–299.

⁸ Bogusław Wolniewicz, “Ułamki praktycznego racjonalizmu”, in: Zbigniew Musiał, Jerzy Skarbek, Bogusław Wolniewicz, *Trzy nurty. Racjonalizm – antyracjonalizm – scjentyzm* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa UW, 2006), 43–47.

character, and character is innate and constant. The kind we come into the world with, the kind we die with.⁹

The starting point for Wolniewicz's reflections on the nature of moral evil in the essay "Epifania diabła" is the popular metaphorical saying that the devil resides in the human nervous system. In exploring this position, Wolniewicz relies on his own acknowledged thesis that there is an inherent tendency to do evil in human nature.

He assumes that there are four levels of organisation in the natural world: elements (inanimate nature), living beings (animals and plants), sentient beings (animals and humans), and rational beings (humans solely). On the first two levels – the elements and living beings – neither good nor evil is visible. Suffering, or physical evil, appears on the third level, while sin, or moral evil, appears on the fourth level, because it manifests itself in rational beings. Demonic, devilish evil would therefore manifest itself at the level of sentient beings, i.e. animals and human beings, since it is only at this level that the nervous system is present. The first three levels of the organisation of nature would be sinless, as sin is inherent in the highest level, and at the same time their common part, the level of suffering, would be both sinless and diabolical. Such an explanation is clearly incoherent; hence, Wolniewicz proposes a different solution.

The devil's field of action is the level of sentience and the level of rational beings, since evil enjoyment is taking pleasure in someone else's harm or suffering. At the last level of human beings the devil becomes visible. However, he is present at all levels, as the possibility of the love of evil being dissipated is already potentially at the level of the elements, and active love of evil is in-

⁹ My own translation, further quotations from Wolniewicz's works in my English translation. Original: "Zło fizyczne, rozumiane jako cierpienie, istnieje w całym świecie czującym. Doznają go na równi człowiek, pies i szczur. Ale zło duchowe, radość z cudzego cierpienia, jest specjalnością ludzką. U zwierząt jej nie ma. Od dwóch tysięcy lat chrześcijaństwo głosi wielką naukę o skażeniu natury ludzkiej grzechem pierworodnym. Ten grzech to właśnie upodobanie do zła, gustowanie w nim. Każdy jest obciążony grzechem pierworodnym, zatem skłonność do zła ma każdy, choć nie każdy w równym stopniu. Zło w człowieku to zły charakter, charakter zaś jest wrodzony i stały. Z jakim przychodzimy na świat, z takim umieramy", *ibidem*, 43.

herent in the last level.¹⁰ Wolniewicz says: “It was the elements that brought forth the world of living beings, that brought forth the animal kingdom, that brought forth man, and with him the devil showed himself in the world. The emanation we are dealing with here is a transitive relation: thus it was the elements that finally brought forth the devil, in them he was and is potentially already present, though not yet visible. There he nests, hidden but ready. Let us not forget that the sleeping devil is also the devil”.¹¹ This type of view has appeared quite frequently throughout the history of human thought. Manichaeism, for example, can be characterised as the view that in the world as well as in man there is an elemental evil, which is a force capable of recognising the good, but nevertheless implacably hostile to it, and not merely blind to it or indifferent to it. St. John, on the other hand, saying that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”,¹² does not mean that he has no power to come out of it, but that, because of his predilection for evil, he has no desire to do so. The view of the essence of evil differs in the Gnostic-Platonic doctrine and the Manichaean-Messianic beliefs. The first identifies the realm of evil with the realm of nature or matter. The opposition of good and evil harmonises with the opposition body-soul. However, in the case of the latter, the two oppositions intersect as follows: there are two souls in the world – one is bright and good, the other dark and evil. These are also the two souls that man possesses. Christian tradition has variously expressed this basic anthropological fact about the primordial evil in human nature, in particular by asserting the contamination of human nature by original sin.

Wolniewicz’s reflections on evil are determined by his conviction that at least some people have a natural inclination towards evil; they do evil for evil’s sake, because it gives them pleasure, some satisfaction. The whole great tradition of European philosophy originating from Socrates and Plato was based

¹⁰ FiW 1, 216. When using the term ‘love of evil’, Wolniewicz clarifies that he means ‘love of evil’, not ‘evil love’.

¹¹ Original: “To żywoły wydały świat istot żywych, ten wydał królestwo zwierząt, to wydało człowieka, a wraz z nim pokazał się na świecie diabeł. Emanacja, z którą mamy tu do czynienia, jest stosunkiem przechodnim: zatem to żywoły wydały koniec końców diabła, w nich był on i jest *potentia* już obecny, choć jeszcze niewidoczny. Tam się gnieździ, ukryty, ale już gotowy. Nie zapominajmy bowiem, że śpiący diabeł to też diabeł”, *ibidem*, 216–217.

¹² St. John, 5:19; English Standard Version of the Millennium Bible.

on the opposite belief – that every human being ultimately chooses the good. Wolniewicz points to two examples of such an attitude – Immanuel Kant’s and Henryk Elzenberg’s.¹³ Kant considered the problem of “radical evil” and distinguished such human transgressions which he did not hesitate to call diabolical, but at the same time he denied that pure evil will, i.e. the desire to act evil for the sake of it, was possible.¹⁴ Elzenberg wrote that some people are indeed characterised by bad will, that they have no good will, but at the same time he claimed that there is no will directed towards evil as such.¹⁵ Wolniewicz does not say this explicitly, but indirectly admits that he cannot under-

¹³ B. Wolniewicz, “Myśl Elzenberga”, *Studia Filozoficzne* 12 (1986); reprinted in: *FiW* 1, 69–94.

¹⁴ *FiW* 2, 354–355. Wolniewicz probably has in mind the following statement by Immanuel Kant: “Sensuality incorporates as a potential source of moral evil insufficiently. By rejecting man’s motivations out of freedom, we make him a purely animal being. Reason, on the other hand, which would release man from the moral law, would contain too much. For it would be, as it were, a malignant reason, a pure evil will, the motive for which is itself opposition to the law. This would make the subject a devilish being. Neither this nor that would apply to man” (“Zmysłowość zawiera jako ewentualne źródło zła moralnego za mało. Odmawiając człowiekowi pobudek z wolności, czynimy zeń istotę czysto zwierzęcą. Natomiast rozum, który zwalniałby człowieka spod prawa moralnego, zawierałby za wiele. Byłby to bowiem niejako rozum złośliwy, czysta zła wola, dla której pobudką jest sam sprzeciw wobec prawa. Czyniłoby to z podmiotu istotę diabelską. Otóż ani to, ani tamto nie stosuje się do człowieka”); Immanuel Kant, *Zło radykalne (Radical Evil)*.

¹⁵ Wolniewicz cites two longer statements by Elzenberg on the subject of ill will. Let us quote excerpts. The first one: “we are worth little not because of some ‘human frailty’ but because of essential ill will. Doubly evil: once that it pursues ends that are not very laudable, and secondly that it acts persistently against better knowledge” (“jesteśmy mało co warci nie przez jakąś ‘ludzka ułomność’, ale przez istotną złą wolę. Złą podwójnie: raz, że dążącą do celów mało chwalebnych, drugi raz, że działającą uporczywie wbrew lepszemu wiedzy”), Henryk Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK w Toruniu, 2002), 251; quoted after *FiW* 2, 9. The second excerpt comes from unpublished notes and is even more forceful: “Man generally does not aspire to any of the values that constitute the root and core of my axiology. He does not possess good will. From my point of view, man is fundamentally and essentialistically a being of ill will” (“Człowiek na ogół nie aspiruje do żadnej z wartości, które stanowią rdzeń i trzon mojej aksjologii. Nie posiada dobrej woli. Z mojego punktu widzenia człowiek jest zasadniczo i esencjonalnie istotą złej woli”). In contrast, the thesis that there is no will directed towards evil as such is found in an undated note found in the manuscripts. Elzenberg states explicitly that “man never pursues evil as evil” and that “he does evil by following his natural drive – he may sometimes know it is evil and yet pursue it, but never because it is evil”, *FiW* 2, 92.

stand this kind of inconsistency.¹⁶ One can only ask, then, whether the real reason is not simply the fear of acknowledging that there are people of devilish character. Wolniewicz certainly does not share this fear.

In the matter of bad (malicious) will Wolniewicz stands on the ground of Arthur Schopenhauer's understanding of man. At the same time, he introduces a certain correction to this philosopher's conception of character. According to Schopenhauer there are three motives for human action: malice, compassion and egoism. Wolniewicz thinks that they should be treated as dependent variables and not, as Schopenhauer wants, as independent variables, which are connected only by a contractual relation. The point is that if the three motives were independent, as Schopenhauer wants, then two of them could have a value of 0 and the third a value of 1. Wolniewicz disputes whether it is possible that a person's behaviour could be a result of just the only one motive, in this case egoism equal to 1, so that both compassion and malice would be 0. To support his point of view that human acting is the consequence of motives dependent from each other, he recalls an authentic drastic example. A young girl was murdered by her two "friends" because they wanted to take her video recorder. The perpetrators, in their account of the murder, did not give the impression of having done something terrible. The experts diagnosed one with a lack of guilt and a striking emotional coldness, and the other with emotional immaturity, with a tendency to cry. That, as far as their characters are concerned, compassion has zero value is beyond doubt, but it is impossible for them not to be malicious at all – this is indicated by the huge disproportion between the benefit of coming into possession of the VCR and the enormity of the evil done. As Wolniewicz suggests, although Schopenhauer understood that for the proper evaluation of an act it is important to see the proportion between benefit and harm, he did not elaborate on the issue. Wolniewicz, for his part, emphasises that the degree of awareness of this ratio depends on the sense of justice inherent in a given individual. In the example given, the disproportion between the benefit and the harm is so huge that we have to conclude that each of the perpetrators completely lacks the sense of justice (justice has zero value for them). Wolniewicz

¹⁶ FiW 1, 94.

concludes: “We would now be ready to accept the following anthropological axiom: a character completely devoid of elements of justice and compassion must contain elements of malice”.¹⁷ This therefore means that in the case of such a bad character, selfishness cannot be the exclusive motive for action, i.e. always $E \neq 1$, but the philosopher admits that he cannot justify this thesis more deeply.

In conducting these considerations, Wolniewicz recalls his view on the congeniality of human character. Man’s will is a matter of character. If someone has bad will, it means that he has bad character. The innateness of character results from its determination in the DNA record, or genetic information. This arrangement of genetic material, specific to almost every human being, is created at the moment of conception. The ill will is already written in the deoxyribonucleic acid strand and will manifest itself in a suitably mature individual. Wolniewicz writes: “The arrangement of nucleotides, which in the language of the genetic code means the same as the words ‘bad character’ in the ethnic language of the Poles, is not any ‘ordinary human trait’. It is love of evil, inscribed – not by humans, of course – in the chemical system of the world. It is this code that contains it and transmits it further and further”.¹⁸

In view of this, one could say that the devil nests in the genetic code, or perhaps in something completely unknown, which is the reason for the existence of this code. The infinite depths of the universe must be taken into account here, both on a macro and on a micro scale. Some sinister and dark force is at work within them, which can be called the devil or the original sin. Wolniewicz cites the view of an American Calvinist theologian, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who stated that mankind’s propensity for evil is constant, so its cause must be internal, i.e. located in human nature, as well as being very powerful. In his essay on the epiphany of the devil, Wolniewicz writes about the problem of evil as “some new form of self-knowledge” that human-

¹⁷ Original: “Bylibyśmy teraz gotowi przyjąć następujący aksjomat antropologiczny: charakter całkowicie pozbawiony elementów sprawiedliwości i współczucia musi zawierać elementy złośliwości”, *ibidem*, 119.

¹⁸ Original: “Układ nukleotydów, który w języku kodu genetycznego znaczy to samo, co w języku etnicznym Polaków znaczą słowa ‘zły charakter’, nie jest żadną ‘zwykłą cechą ludzką’. Jest to miłość zła, wpisana – nie przez ludzi, rzecz jasna – w chemiczny ustrój świata. To ów kod zawiera ją w sobie i transmituje coraz dalej i dalej”, *ibidem*, 217.

ity is slowly beginning to realise. He considers this issue to be a great philosophical problem, which today is taken up by writers and poets: Stanisław Lem, Aleksander Wat, Czesław Miłosz and others, but always in a form that is only just emerging.¹⁹

The whole movement of thought is slowly beginning to concentrate and crystallize around a certain idea which is very old, but which appears to us today, at the end of the 20th century, in a completely new and different light: the idea of the devil. [...] I have not been able [...] to achieve in the matter under consideration such clarity of concepts or such firmness of statements as this matter would require. Therefore, the reader should consider these arguments as yet another attempt at expressing something that – as yet unnamed – is seeking an adequate expression for itself in our epoch. It is not particularly strange that such efforts are being made only now. The 20th century is coming to an end and it is time to take stock. Under the rubric of “affairs of the devil” we would like to note in this review that it was the century of his Great Epiphany.²⁰

The word “epiphany” in Greek means “the appearance of something, a revelation”. In early Christianity, an “epiphany” was the anniversary (6th of January) of the revelation of the Deity to the world and celebrated as Christmas. Wolniewicz, for the purposes of his deliberations, gives the term “epiphany” a broader meaning. “By epiphany, in our wider sense, we shall mean any revelation in the human world of something which is outside the order of this world; and by ‘human world’ simply that of which the newspapers write”.²¹ Epiphany can be expressed as a relation: ‘x is the epiphany of y’. The first part is within the realm of everyday ordinary human experience, while the second is outside it. It is not necessary, although possible, to understand it theologically. Wolniewicz, on the basis of Platonism, puts it as follows: “visible things are the epiphany of invisible idea”, although he points out that Plato himself used the term “parousia” in place of “epiphany”.

The idea of the devil is more difficult to explain. It may be considered as a certain myth, i.e. a more or less fantastic set of images, consolidated by tra-

¹⁹ Ibidem, 208–209.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ Ibidem, 209.

dition, or as a certain theoretical construction, i.e. a concept. Wolniewicz: "Myth and concept are at the very least closely related, a little like the graph of a function and its algebraic formula: the concept of the 'devil' illuminates the meaning of its myth, and the myth illustrates the content of the concept, makes it more easily assimilated mentally".²² The devil as a myth is present in religions, but not in all of them, e.g. he does not appear in Greek mythology. Wolniewicz wonders how to recognise this figure in a purely philological sense, i.e. without prejudging its real existence. He finds it of little use to say that the devil is the personification of evil. Firstly, it is too broad of a characterisation, because not every innate tendency to pursue and realise evil is the personification of the devil, e.g. vampires or Old German Trolls are not devils. Secondly, the relation of "personification" is difficult to define. The personified element can be almost anything, it can be phenomena, things, notions, tendencies, forces, institutions, etc. About the personifying element, however, "we know only that it is some person – real or imaginary – to whom this completely undefined personified element is to remain in some equally undefined relation of 'personification'". (In fact, it is probably a whole family of different relationships, sometimes contradictory).²³ Thirdly, it should probably be said that the evil personified by the devil is not just any evil, i.e. it cannot be said of every single misfortune that befalls us, which is undoubtedly evil. Devilish evil is some special kind of evil.

Any religion clearly polarised into moral good and moral evil is termed 'dualism' or ditheism. Ancient Iran is the cradle of all ditheism, whose religion distinguished two realms – the Kingdom of Light, with the Lord of Wisdom reigning in it, and the Kingdom of Darkness, with the Spirit of Evil reigning in it. This idea penetrated first into Judaism (6th century BC), then into Christianity and Islam. Only these religions contain the idea of the devil. In the absence of the ideological background of ditheism, evil beings are harmful only in utilitarian terms, they are admittedly dangerous and a source of misery and unpleasantness, but not of sin. According to Wolniewicz, Christianity is a ditheism because the key point here is the recognition of the exist-

²² Ibidem, 210.

²³ Ibidem, 211.

ence of two non-earthly Antagonists. “It is not important whether these two non-terrestrial Antagonists are both eternal, or whether they both arose from something prior to them [...] or whether, finally, one created the other, and the latter then became independent of it, opposed it, and defied it. Nor does it matter what the prognosis of this antagonism is in a given religion: whether in the end one will defeat the other, or whether the struggle between them will continue indefinitely. [...] What matters is what is now [...] next to the King of Heaven the Prince of this World has power on the Earth, and their antagonism continues”²⁴

The concept of the devil is more important than its myth. The basic definition formulated by Wolniewicz is as follows: “the devil is the love of evil”²⁵ According to it, the devil is some kind of a cosmic force, not a person. This cosmic force, of unknown origin, acts in people and through people. In the love of evil we can distinguish two components: active, as a certain striving, and passive, as a certain experiencing. The active component is bad will, or the conscious pursuit of evil. This consists in the fact that, despite knowing that something is evil, one strives for it precisely because it is evil. The passive component is evil enjoyment, i.e. the predilection for evil, which manifests itself in the joy of realising it. Wolniewicz proposes here the following equivalence: evil love = evil will + evil joy. These two components are coupled and dependent on each other, the “+” sign signifying a logical sum. For, if someone has bad will, he also feels bad joy, and whoever feels bad joy undoubtedly also has bad will. Wolniewicz: “Our definition puts the question of the devil’s existence at once on real ground, though it does not, of course, prejudice it. To ask whether the devil exists is to ask whether the love of evil exists: whether such a notable phenomenon can be observed somewhere in the universe”²⁶ So here we have the following sequence of equivalences, due to the mutual coupling of the components of love and evil: the devil exists if and only if there is evil love; the devil exists if and only if there is evil will; the devil exists if and only if there is evil joy. To acknowledge any of the formulas on the right side of equivalence is to recognise the existence of the devil.

²⁴ Ibidem, 213–214.

²⁵ Ibidem, 214.

²⁶ Ibidem, 214–215.

Accepting, for example, the axiomatic assumption that there is a love for evil, from the premises: the devil is a love of evil and there is a love of evil, the thesis follows: the devil exists. To question this thesis, one would have to question one of the premises.

Wolniewicz assumes the possibility that those who disagree with him on this issue may not dispute the axiom: “there is a love for evil”, but to acknowledge that the devil in this sense is no cosmic force; and, agreeing that there is evil will and evil joy in the world, to consider that these are simply ordinary human traits. These would be, in their view, common human afflictions, in this definition exaggerated to demonic proportions. The philosopher replies that ill-will and bad enjoyment are human traits, but they are not “ordinary” traits at all. “They are precisely demonic qualities, and their ordinariness in man should take on dread”.²⁷ Man as a part of this universe is its emanation. The qualities that are inherent in man are also indicative of the qualities of the universe that have always been in it, even before man appeared on Earth, and will continue to be after he disappears. Human traits are a manifestation of the eternal forces and potencies that most clearly come to the fore in man.

Rejecting the axiom that there is a love of evil would mean accepting the claim that neither in the world nor in man is there any love of evil. Such a questioning of the existence of the devil would lead to an anthropological discussion concerning the most essential features of human nature. Two great positions would have to dominate this discussion: anthropological meliorism and pejorism. It would therefore be a debate marked by the question of whether man always strives for what is objectively better and yet does evil as a result of faulty judgement, or whether man does not always strive for what is objectively better, even when he is fully aware of it. Wolniewicz obviously advocates the latter position. He points out that the love of evil rarely manifests itself in human action in a “chemically pure” form, i.e. it is usually intertwined and overshadowed by an enormous amount of stupidity, laziness, selfishness, wickedness and other such traits, for example, wickedness is a ‘normal’ trait when it serves someone’s readily perceived benefit. However, there have been events and deeds in the history of mankind of which it can be

²⁷ Ibidem, 215.

said that there has been a condensation of evil, that is, some evil has occurred in a given place and time in a dimension that exceeds normal human understanding. Wolniewicz emphasises that the love of evil is selfless, and this makes it true love, because only unselfish love is true. The devil cannot be attributed to selfishness in any way; on the contrary, his motives are completely free from any egoism, i.e. being driven by self-interest. “From the evil he loves he expects no tangible benefits – except the one of the joy of seeing it”.²⁸

Wolniewicz proposes the term ‘epiphany of evil’ to denote any point of condensation of evil in different places and moments. Epiphanies of the devil can be great and minor. However, one should not regard these small condensations of evil merely as some “pathologies” or “aberrations”. Wolniewicz quotes a fragment of Stanislaw Lem’s statement as feeling anxiety and doubts because of the following: “[...] I am astonished and worried by the fact that there are people who do evil in an unselfish way and take great pleasure in destroying people’s lives, values and creations. [...] I sense an aura of uneasiness that something is wrong here. [...] Selfless evil does exist, and I am not arguing with Augustine that it is a lack of goodness. There is something more there – an intention, an active intention”.²⁹

In Wolniewicz’s view, the twentieth century was a great epiphany of the devil – “the devil was let off the chain”, and this happened with the beginning of the First World War (1 August 1914). This enormous devaluation of human life has contributed to the emergence of communism, National Socialism, these to the Second World War and later to the Khmer Rouge. What is most striking about twentieth-century epiphanies such as Katyn or Treblinka is their “utilitarian meaninglessness”. For there is no utilitarianly adequate answer to the question of why it happened. The sense of irrationality here is only apparent. Wolniewicz brings up, among others, the example of the crime committed in Katyn. In the spring of 1940, when the political and military situation in Russia was extremely precarious and elementary reason ordered abstention from any radical actions, the order of murder was given. The researcher who wants to discover the aims and motivations that prevail in such

²⁸ Ibidem, 220.

²⁹ Stanisław Beres, “Rozmowy z Lemem” (3), *Odra* 7–8 (1985): 35–36; quoted after: *FiW* 1, 216.

epiphanies is helpless to search for them either in subsequent archival documents or in the findings of psychology or sociology. New documents will not discover anything novel, nor will fundamentally melioristic psychology or sociology. Wolniewicz points to a theology which alone is far from meliorism. The Great Epiphany of the twentieth century transcended ordinary human measures; all that is known is that some dark forces of the universe were revealed in it.

Although Wolniewicz considers the notion of the devil, he does not avoid the language typical of mythical stories. He quotes, among other things, the view of Ephrem of Edessa (306–373), one of the lesser-known Fathers of the Church, who claimed that the devil is characterised by great patience, that it works for the long haul. The validity of this thesis is confirmed, according to Wolniewicz, by the frequently encountered opinion that there is no point in recalling Treblinka or Katyn today, because it was a long time ago and one should think about the future. This is, according to the philosopher, the voice of the devil, preparing for another epiphany. The worst thing is that in cases of manifestations of the devil, natural selection seems to favour evilness, i.e. at the genetic-molecular level the phenomenon increases. Wolniewicz cites Czesław Miłosz, who wondered who the current population of Russia was made up of, when in the case of Stalin’s mass purges there were millions of ordinary people who took an active part in the repression of millions of also ordinary people.³⁰ Wolniewicz sums up his consideration of the twentieth-century Great Epiphany: “After the eruptions of ill will that were the Great Epiphany of our century, two final conclusions irresistibly emerge: (1) there are whole reservoirs of evil hidden in human nature and waiting ready for something to bring them to the surface; (2) in order to consolidate these reservoirs, it is necessary to develop a theology of the devil, a very neglected field”.³¹

The core of the dispute between the pejorist and meliorist worldviews is the question of whether epiphanies of evil really exist, while the other questions are derivative. As an “epiphany of the devil” Wolniewicz defines such

³⁰ FiW 1, 221. Wolniewicz’s reference to: Czesław Miłosz, *Rok myśliwego* (Kraków: Znak, 1991), 257–258.

³¹ FiW 1, 223.

human behaviour that indicates the existence of ill will and evil joy in the world; these, in his opinion, are provided by everyday life. It would therefore be a debate about whether man always strives for what is objectively better, and only because of an error does he do otherwise, or whether, however, man does not always strive for what is objectively better, even when he is fully aware of it. Wolniewicz argues for the second position.

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