

## Article

# Evil, Excess and Transcendence

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**Abstract:** This article aims to overcome the prevailing philosophical views that understand evil from an ontological or metaphysical perspective through the reconciliation of being or God with the presence of evil in the world. In this sense, the phenomenological approach offers an adequate and renewed process to rethink the phenomenon of evil. To this end, I will show how the ontological treatment of evil as a deprivation of good corresponds neither to the way evil appears in experience nor to the recognition of the evidence of evil as a positive and effective reality that empirically rules and distorts relations within the world. This ontological consideration also fails to account for the transcendence of evil in its excessive condition, since this excess constitutes it as a phenomenon of radical exteriority to consciousness. Moreover, the overbearing and surprising presence of evil in the world demands from conscience a special spiritual penetration that does not justify evil, but rather exposes and condemns it. This can only be carried out in the disposition of the living to resist evil and to remain in the sphere of ethical difference, which consists of living in the good and for the good through the eradication of evil.

**Keywords:** good; exteriority; anguish; ethical difference; diabolical intentionality

## 1. Introduction

This article aims to approach the problem of evil from a strictly phenomenological perspective. My purpose is to show that the phenomenological approach constitutes an adequate way to overcome a reductive vision of evil. Such views are related to ontological or metaphysical considerations, which ultimately attempt to reconcile God with the presence of evil in the world. That evil could become an occasion for good to be revealed and fully realized is a premature and somewhat unfounded assertion, since it contradicts human experience and its very aspiration towards otherness. There is no ontological understanding of evil that would allow it to be leveled with the good (to explain it, to justify it), as if the latter—evil—could be deduced from or referred to the very essence of the perfect good<sup>1</sup>.

However, it is possible to undertake a phenomenological access to the essence of malignity that accounts for the intimate intertwining of good and the recognition of evil as a positive—albeit factual—reality whose essence, ascertainable from experience, would consist in distorting the relations between beings within the empirical world. In order to carry out this phenomenological approach, I will approach the problem of evil from three perspectives. First, based on the dialogue between the French philosophers Philippe Nemo and Emmanuel Levinas on the subject of Nemo's book *Job and the Excess of Evil*, I will examine the need to rethink the capacity for transcendence of the human being and even the transcendent condition of evil in dialogue with its excessive character, as it appears in experience, that is, under a surprising and factual modality. Second, following the reflections of the Russian philosopher, Semen Frank, in his book *The light shineth in the darkness*, I will show how the efficacy of evil, evidenced in the last century of European history, forces human beings to understand and accept the intentionality of the good in their life from its confrontation with the empirical domination that evil exercises in the world. Facing this evil, good is not assured of victory. In the last section, I will analyze, also in dialogue with the Russian philosopher Semen Frank, the origin of the crisis of



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modern humanism, its cynicism and its role in the constitution of a diabolical empire (the utopianism of the diabolical), which replicates the presence of evil in the world and reinforces its absolutely unpredictable character.

Thus, following the approaches of Philippe Nemo, Emmanuel Levinas and Semen Frank, I propose a phenomenological interpretation of evil in which the traditional metaphysical interpretations of evil, and its relation to a metaphysical idea of God which deprives evil of its reality are replaced by a new ethical perspective. This perspective will make it possible to simultaneously recognize evil as an active reality within the world while disposing the conscience to deal with this phenomenon without explaining or justifying it, i.e., from a sober struggle which tries to protect the world from the unfolding of evil.

## 2. The Transcendence of Evil: The Ex- of Exteriority

In response to Philippe Nemo's work on Job, Levinas stresses that the effort exerted through the act of thinking about evil implies the positioning of the human reflection in an attempt to propose or achieve a sense of what transcendence means independently of their *conatus essendi* (Nemo 2001, pp. 150–51), i.e., the concern to unveil the meaning of what is ultimately present. In that sense, the transcendence of evil places man in the position of having to think of himself and the concept of intentionality<sup>2</sup> in a different way.

However, this consideration does not suppress the question of the conditions of the possibility of the appearance of evil. That is, under what conditions can the experience of evil come about? How do humans become aware of its existence? What is the symptom of its presence in their own life? Nemo does not hesitate to affirm that anguish is the experiential correlation which shows the presence of evil in human life. However, as Levinas rightly identifies, Nemo understands anguish in a peculiar way: neither as a psychological state resulting from the circumstances affecting one's own existence, nor as the perception or affective recognition of an insurmountable finitude, the horizon of nothingness, which would somehow envelop one's own existence. In fact, it would have more to do with a physical ailment or suffering, acquiring different modalities in the living: illness, death or putrefaction (Nemo 2001, p. 152) of the living flesh that we are. In this sense, the evils that affect our flesh already gnaw away at our identity, so that it cannot constitute a monolithic block, but lives with the constant possibility of being violated, altered and traumatized (Levinas 2011, p. 253). These evils show us that there must be at least another dimension of meaning, which resists reducing transcendence to the phenomenon of truth and its manifestation in being (Levinas 1978, p. 82). Thus, physical evils and the resulting distressing experience (anguish) maintain such a link to the existent to the extent that they de facto preclude both the consideration of humans as pure finitude and attributing evil to a relative reality, as if it constituted a kind of deprivation of good or a modality of that which in itself lacks reality, namely, the negation of something.

Yet, the essence of malignity,<sup>3</sup> experienced in the suffering flesh, is revealed in its excessiveness, in its limitless capacity to affect human existence. It is not then that the excess of malignity constitutes a quantitative determination in itself. It is not exactly equal to the category of intensity,<sup>4</sup> since intensity points to an identification of certain phenomena that makes the life of human existence unbearable. However, on the contrary, evil does not exactly have to do with the aspect that a sufferer can give to his own pain. Its essential condition does not depend on quantitative categories. Furthermore, it is qualitative in itself. However, what is this qualitative character of evil as such?

The qualitative character of evil would basically lie in its character of being non-integrable (Nemo 2001, p. 153). It is necessary to note that this non-integrability has to do, in a certain way, with its unbearability. What is more, its realization constitutes the very unbearability experienced in its quantitative extension, mostly, when evil received in the conscience under the unique and exclusive modality of unbearability wants to become the essence of malignity in the effort of consciousness to translate it, to make it comprehensible in categories that allow the phenomenon to be kept under control. It is precisely due to this effort that we owe the usual confusion between evil and suffering, as if the latter were the

expression of radical evil. However, the confusion between evil and suffering is ultimately an attempt of the consciousness to synchronize the evil phenomenon and subject it to the transcendental conditions of providing meaning in order to synthesize it. This kind of synthesis results in evil unable to escape the proper horizon of immanence—of what ultimately can (and even must) occur in the world and only in the world.

However, the reception of evil as a phenomenon, its appearance, implies a breakdown in the disposition of existence consisting in the modality of being unable to find a place (Nemo 2001, p. 154) for the evil phenomenon in a constituted world. In fact, finding a place for it in the world would be a disorder, a monstrosity, something that goes against nature (Nemo 2001, p. 154). In this sense, its character external to consciousness is not defined by dialectical opposition to an interiority that could in any case subsume it under a categorical form, enclosing evil in a horizon of intelligibility (Nemo 2001, p. 154). Furthermore, its exteriority overpowers consciousness and disposes it to that which is on the margins of all conceivable exteriority. Thus, evil is not exteriority, but what is left over from exteriority, its excess, that is, the *ex-* of exteriority (Nemo 2001, p. 154). At this point, it is necessary to consider that the concept of exteriority has traditionally pointed to a truth whose essence is related to that which appears (Henry 1996, p. 22), making itself manifest in the horizon of visibility of a world. In short, the horizon of the world places itself before consciousness in order to lend itself to its projective or representational capacities for giving an account of it. Furthermore, the experience of evil leads us to affirm that even though evil occurs externally on the margins of the consciousness, its mode of reception does not take place within a worldly exteriority. Rather, the mode of reception takes place in the unassimilable character of its appearance. Evil does not show within a worldly exteriority. It systematically and excessively questions what human beings can conceive of reality. In this sense, evil is not the traditionally conceived exteriority, but is what exceeds that exteriority.

The excessive character of this exteriority of evil does not exhaust the content of malignity. And this is because in suffering, we experience a peculiar kind of intentionality when confronted with the excessiveness of evil. The acknowledgement of this intentionality tends to call into question any process of identification that the subject undertakes when dealing with reality. Thus, in the evil that reaches one's conscience, the conscience receives the direct interpellation of that which was completely unforeseeable. Additionally, this interpellation, in turn, appears to me as if someone with malice was seeking to inflict harm on me (Nemo 2001, p. 156). The open wound in the face of the question of the evil suffered: Why me? (Ricoeur 2004, p. 22) corroborates this perception of this intentionality of evil in human existence.

This intentionality of evil is revealed as a transcendent intentionality that questions the subject in order to awaken him to the phenomenon of his responsibility<sup>5</sup>. In fact, from Levinas' point of view, someone is addressing me, is seeking me through evil (Nemo 2001, p. 157), through my paradoxical relationship with it, and with a single aim: to find no place in myself and no rest to explain to myself what is happening to me and what entails my own helplessness. In this way, the intentionality of evil helps to make clear that the question of the evil I suffer is not the question to which I must respond. It is not required, therefore, that I may understand my suffering or that I can assign it a place in the cosmos, thereby giving it a neutral, anonymous and impersonal treatment that allows it to be incorporated into the bosom of history and, incidentally, to be integrated into the legality of things based, ultimately, on our *conatus essendi*.

Thus, a human being's disposition towards suffering under evil underlines the risk of living exposed to the whims of a transcendent intentionality that seeks its awakening in and through evil in its excessive condition. Subjectivity may or may not assume this risk, surrendering itself to the exposure of not knowing how to respond not to the question of "Why being rather than nothingness?" but this more radical one: Why evil rather than good? The primacy of this question places ethical difference above ontological difference (Nemo 2001, pp. 157–58). In this sense, the meaning of human existence does not begin to be elucidated by the capacity to discriminate the being of entities and to account for their

reciprocal relations, but by the human capacity to stand and live in the difference between evil and good. At this point, transcendence, in its most radical meaning—ethics—directs evil towards humans in order to underline their exceptional and even split condition with respect to the world, i.e., to live only in the good and for the good through the eradication of evil<sup>6</sup>.

Nevertheless, both evil and good seem to point to an excessive condition animated by the same transcendent intentionality. However, if this is really so, does the excessive condition of evil reveal the same thing as the excessive condition of good? In order to distinguish between the two of them, we should first of all make some considerations that will allow us to delve even deeper into the essence of evil. In the first instance, evil always presents itself in the first instance with a certain physical character. In this respect, it is necessary to bear in mind that the physical character of evil is linked to the experience of anguish. The experience of anguish is intrinsically related to evils affecting our flesh, namely, evils of a physical nature (illness, death, putrefaction, etc.). This physical character, which ultimately corresponds to the root of the experience of anguish, speaks to us of its operative and surprising (*Gesché* 1995, p. 47) facticity that results in a human existence doomed to the permanent possibility of its violation or alteration. This facticity is accompanied by its empirical confirmation. It is necessary to note that, although the essence of evil cannot be determined from quantitative categories, united by the stamp of intensity, certainly its effectuation does speak of its capacity to create fissures<sup>7</sup> in all established order in time whatever political, social, anthropological, etc. These fissures can be measured and act everywhere, constantly contravening any fixed rule or law. In this way, evil acts in its phenomenal manifestations. These manifestations are quantitatively determinable. This means that the only sphere of evil's action is quantitative. In turn, the quantitative action of evil favors the increasing intensity of suffering; namely, the phenomenon of unbearability and the confusion between radical evil and suffering. The phenomenological action of evil tells us, apart from its excessive character, about the empirical dominion (*Frank* 1989, pp. 8–9) that it exercises over the world and mostly over the soul which surrenders itself to the exercise of its constant synchronization; as if suffering, caused by evil, were the true evil to be eradicated. The excessiveness of evil can reinforce the human tendency to understand evil as opposed to the transcendent intentionality of good. This tendency proceeds through the dissociation of evil from the transcendent intentionality of good. It can also proceed through a full explanation of evil. What is more, the strengthening of this tendency occurs when human beings try to level evil and good in history as if evil and good could respond to the same logic or under the same categorical forms. Evil demands of humans a disposition to resist it: a resistance that goes through the contravention of the human tendency to justify and explain it. This ethical disposition demands from humans the actual concern for the experience of suffering one can cause to others (*García-Baró López* 2006, p. 43). In this way, the empirical domain of evil, opened by an intentionality of a transcendent character, requires of the human beings both their maintenance in a constant state of exceptionality and their exposure to whatever may befall them, above all, the empirical facticity of evil. Such exposure to evil does not imply a passive attitude towards evil, but an entirely active one, for it serves to foster that sense (that capacity for meaning) which, although it is exceeded, protects the world or involves subjectivity in the exercise of its permanent protection (*Frank* 1989, p. 124). In such involvement, the subject recognizes in a practical way the presence of evil as a positive and active reality, thereby standing firm in the exposure to the source of all conceivable meaning in its ultimacy: the relation between evil and good and their difference occurring in the depths of consciousness. That attitude does not try to minimize evil or to declare its negativity or its absence of reality. On the contrary, it lives open to the factual excess of evil from the excessive condition of good. This excessive condition of the good subjects him to concern for the suffering of the other.

That the excessive condition of the good does not correspond to the factual-excessive condition of evil does not in any way mean that the efficacy of evil comes to be annihilated by the omnipotent character or transcendent intentionality of the good. The reason for

this impotence of the good is the following one: good cannot grant a form of logical or cosmological explanation to account for evil. That kind of explanation would amount to justifying its existence within an order. It is, therefore, that the good is destined in the world and in history to suffer the factual and unrelenting opposition of evil (Frank 1989, p. 10). When this opposition is experienced and lived in the consciousness of subjectivity, the soul acquires a particular spiritual penetration (Frank 1989, p. 9) that enables it to account for evil not metaphysically or logically, but historically, in order to answer the question of the practical meaning of human life.

### 3. The Excessiveness of Evil in Its Historical Unfolding

According to Russian philosopher Semen Frank, the problem of the confrontation of good with evil in its historical dynamism constitutes the most essential and pressing problem affecting human existence (Frank 1989, p. 10). In this sense, reflection on the essentiality of evil—on the basis of the preceding considerations that we have made, is in danger of acquiring a certain abstract character, should we not pay due attention to the historical expressions that have confirmed and confirm its presence in history. It is thus the facts that confirm the excessiveness of evil, although this cannot be reduced either to them or to their juxtaposition. In this respect, looking at the facts, confronting the efficacy of the evil latent in them presupposes maintaining—to a heroic degree—that transcendent intentionality of the good that we referred to earlier. In other words, it is not possible to reflect on evil without paying due attention to history, and without being concerned by everything that has happened and is happening around us.

Following Semen Frank's approach in his book *Light Shineth in the Darkness*, my argument will show how the consideration of the unfolding of evil in history helps to understand and remain in the realm of ethical difference and thus in the dynamism of the transcendent intentionality of the good, which implies its infinite dialogue with evil.

A cursory glance at the history of European humanity in recent centuries, but especially in the 20th century, reveals, beyond any explanation that justifies, levels, or articulates and orders the facts, throws a bitter impression: that in the confrontation of good with evil, the latter has reached unimaginable and unexpected heights. Thus, evil has become such a source of scandal that the existent cannot but be forced to doubt the transcendent intentionality of the good that invites him to its permanent exposure. This doubt is not to be understood in a merely skeptical view but constitutes the expression of an existential doubt. This existential doubt is based on the existential reception of a confrontation: the confrontation between good and evil. This reception does not seek to explain events or to articulate them in hermeneutics that contextualize them. Rather, it seeks to expose and condemn the facts (Frank 1989, p. 12), not in an objective gaze, but in the existential assumption of the drama.

At the heart of this drama, which takes place historically, the human being bitterly acknowledges (Frank 1989, p. 20) that the force of error is much greater than the force of truth and that the forces of irrationality are more powerful than the forces of rationality. Along with this realization, uncertainty grows in human beings about the good and its proper character. The latter, in its variants and/or modalities, cannot but appear in the world as something extremely fragile and immensely weak in the fragility of a world whose essence ultimately consists of the arbitrary and blind play of human passions (greed, hatred and power); sifted by an almost inexhaustible sadistic potential.

The European human being of the two World Wars, educated in the principles of classical-illustrated culture and Christian consciousness, has chillingly brought about this worldly essence.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, this cultural formation of European humans led to a refinement in the ways of reducing the condition of their fellows through torture and murder. In this way, the exercise of cruelty, so effective at the level of social, political and economic organization, came to be enshrined—and indeed is still enshrined today—as the ultimate cultural expression. Therefore, the cynicism of these Europeans knew no bounds, and their works remain. The fatality of these works can no longer be reversed. Examples of



these kinds are the gas chambers or the creation of the atomic bomb, a supposed prodigy of physics, i.e., of a scientific knowledge whose fruit contains the permanent possibility of wiping humanity off the face of the earth.

It is difficult to perpetually inform oneself of these events, to expose oneself to the existential conflict to which they lead us. For this reason, it is common to find immoral arguments that attempt to rationalize such events as either deriving from the maintenance of certain doctrines of a fanatical nature or implicating specific individuals or nations mistaken in the construction of their own cultural project (Frank 1989, p. 13). The immoral nature of these arguments comes from the fact that in one way or another, evil is justified or explained. In no case do these arguments expose or condemn evil as a phenomenon that should not have taken place under any circumstances. This self-righteous tendency is ultimately based on a way of thinking that avoids the intentionality of the good—avoiding the gain of exposure to historical events and their fatality—as if this intentionality had nothing to do with oneself or with the inherent possibilities of the human essence. In short, as if the effectiveness of evil were only the result of less stable cultures.

Levinas and Frank demonstrate that the rise of totalitarianisms and the expression of untold horrors committed by them took place within a European humanity conceived under the cultural project of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> In Germany, this project resulted in a moral catastrophe and descent into barbarism, not only responding to the historical and cultural context of that particular country, but extrapolated to European humanity as a whole. In the end, Germany revealed the existence of a sickness in the European human spiritual condition (Frank 1989, p. 14).

This illness is not ultimately based on the visible fact or symptom that many Europeans, before the declaration of World War II, expressed their favor and sympathy with the very intentions of Nazi ideology and its inhumane practices (Frank 1989, p. 14). Some were even more diligent in their application of this ideology than the Nazis themselves. Indeed, even certain Churches went so far as to sign concordats of convenience with such ideologies (Levinas 2018, p. 8). Thus, the following principle is derived: under certain conditions, it is extremely easy for a cultivated and educated man to become a barbarian or a monster (Frank 1989, p. 14). This is what the transcendent intentionality of good speaks of when we are exposed to its inner conflict: its powerlessness in the face of the factual-excessive condition of evil. The good is not powerful enough to overcome the empirical dominance that evil exercises over the world. Even more, it can be overwhelmed (Frank 1989, p. 20) by the factual power of evil.

This same transcendent intentionality of the good speaks to us not of evil doctrines, but of a spirit of evil or, rather, of an evil instinct in humans which, as if in slumber, actively seeks an ideological justification for revealing itself and becoming able to find reasonable and sophisticated ways to express its own cruelty. This evil spirit is described by Frank as the spirit of hatred, cynicism and complacency. It dwells in everyone and reaches its highest expression in the experience of war. Indeed, this spirit inhabited the conscience of many allies of the Anglo-Saxon world. They were precisely those who, upholding the principles of freedom and respect for man, went so far as to propose the destruction and annihilation of the German nation, or justified the use of the atomic bomb as an instrument of war (Frank 1989, p. 15).

In any case, the spirit of evil and its capacity for enveloping the historical unfolding of all human existence constitutes a painful trove of evidence verified not by the force of facts, but by the transcendent intentionality of the good. This transcendent intentionality of the good presupposes a new orientation for consciousness. This new orientation results in its exposure to the infinite dialogue that good maintains with evil by recognizing its presence and exposing itself to the evidence of its undeniable facticity.

The good demands of us the courage to hold one's gaze on the factuality of evil, not as something unreal, or as a result of certain facts, individualities, or institutions, but as the expression of "a superhuman force that cannot be overcome by any human effort or by any external measure" (Frank 1989, p. 15). This last proposition points to the fact that in its

historical dynamism, evil is already an excess. It is in a certain sense transcendent. Evil surpasses humans. Evil takes humans by surprise when they are completely satisfied with their own achievements, whether cultural, social or spiritual. In this sense, humans' dwell in this world in the realm of an almost impenetrable darkness. In this light, the Gospel's expressions referring to the existence of a prince of this world accord (Frank 1989, p. 15). The existence of a prince of this world means that the world is full of evil facts. That the world is full of bad deeds is not due to the determinative force of those facts or even to the human freedom that gives rise to them. Rather, Frank states that the rootedness of evil in the world is somehow related to a supernatural force that governs and distorts the relations that take place in the empirical world.

Certain metaphysical explorations, such as those carried out by the German philosopher Nicolai Hartmann, seem to confirm this intuitive observation that human beings can easily recognize the exercise of their own condition in the world. The forces of the spiritual order are not deployed in the world as effectively as the forces of the material order. Thus, it is not difficult to see how the causes that originate from the interaction between empirical elements work more effectively in the intra-mundane realm than those originated by the immaterial. The influence of the latter and their degree of manifestation in reality cannot but be regarded as weak or always weaker than all those forces resulting from the organic interaction of beings. Thus, the structure of the worldly presents itself with a certain opacity or indifference towards the good, truth and reason exerted on it (Frank 1989, p. 15). In short, the law of the world, already considered in itself, offers us elements to consider it as dominated by the power of darkness by establishing a precise disproportion between the level of being and its degree of manifestation. This disproportion can be summarized thusly: the higher the level of being, the lesser the power of manifestation. In other words, the facticity of a being (the fact of its being there) is inversely proportional to the possibilities of its essence. The more inner the essential principle of something is, the less capacity or force it has to position itself in existence (Hartmann 1956, p. 78). As an outcome, the structure of the intramundane being—in its objective consideration—eagerly allows darkness and evil in order to exercise their dominion in all orders of reality.

It must not be forgotten that there is a truth which involves the objective order of the world. This truth harbors within itself not only the possibility, but also the factuality of permanent darkness. However, this previous truth must coexist—and in fact coexists—with the truth that lies in the human heart: that truth which seeks to shine in the darkness and at the same time does not want to give a justification for evil. In addition, this truth exposes human beings to itself with a single aim: to condemn evil in the sober struggle of those who recognize its existence (Frank 1989, p. 20).

Nevertheless, such coexistence between both truths should not be understood as harmonious. Rather, a disharmony—a torment (Frank 1989, p. 16), or a real suffering—is introduced to existence based on a relationship difficult to reconcile; such as one that realizes the triumph of evil in the world and the defeat of good, but believes in or lives for gaining exposure to the transcendent intentionality of that good, which speaks even in the midst of the evil or untold evils. certain general conceptions of the world and its structure that have arisen throughout history have sought to establish a growing equivalence between the two spheres of reality or truth. These conceptions hold, facing the evidence of evil, the idea that the structure of intramundane being is entirely subject and directly open to both rationality (truth) and the dynamism of ethical action and transcendent good. According to them, the objective order of the world and the experience we can make of it through scientific knowledge and the exercise of wisdom of a political order would be not only open to but permeated by the transcendent action of truth and the good, as if an equivalence could be established between the objectivity of the world and the good. It is as if the good could or had to omit the disproportion.

One historical example of these conceptions is the Jewish faith. At its beginnings, the Jewish faith was based on an unshakeable belief in a God who intervenes in history as a political factor. God was presented to Jewish belief not only as a political protector, but also

as Yahweh Sabaoth, i.e., the God of armies<sup>10</sup> who enabled the Israelites to triumph and defeat all their enemies. Thus, in the Israelite faith, the transcendence of God (the religious content of that belief) converged with that historical–objective consideration of the events taking place in the world. In that sense, the Jewish religious beliefs constituted a vision that made the attempt to establish an inappropriate equivalence between the action of a transcendent good and the objective order of the world.

Likewise, the cosmological order, conceived and articulated by Greek thought, translating the divine wisdom into the whole order of the cosmos,<sup>11</sup> as if it were a direct incarnation of the divine element, had as a direct consequence the agreement between the objective knowledge of the world (religious knowledge) and the transcendent–religious content towards the aims of existence.

This agreement was seized upon by the medieval conception of the world, which attempted the harmonization of faith and reason, under the achievement of their mutual referencing and interpenetration in the great synthesis elaborated by the theologian and philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas. Throughout his work, Aquinas attempted to conceive of the world as the harmonious unfolding of divine action, that is, as a symbol of God. The belief that the objective order of the world was organized around religious principles allowed St. Thomas to articulate, deploy and cultivate an exercise of his own rationality. In this rationality, scientific thought and life experience could harmoniously appear with the religious truth of the human heart (the content of faith) under the assumption—not without paradox—that everything that happens in the world is called or inclined to happen not only rationally but harmoniously with the designs of a Divine Providence.<sup>12</sup> It is in this synergy between the content of faith and scientific knowledge that we can detect both the origin of an intellectualist drift of thought: “the reality of the world is entirely knowable” and the symbolic excesses to which it leads: “the world is a symbol of God”. This project is performed by trying to postulate an analogous reference between the being of God and the being of the world, as if, in the last analysis, the truth of the Gospels could be referred to the truths found by the various human sciences, and vice versa.

In all these views, including the medieval, we cannot ignore that there is a clear omission, i.e., an attempt to overlook the painful evidence of the factuality of evil. Such an omission has opened up an almost unbridgeable abyss (Frank 1989, p. 17) within the modern conception of the world and of life, tinged by a shift from belief in God to absolute belief or trust in humanity; shaken by the traumatic events that have punctuated the 20th century and the ancient, predominantly medieval vision.

However, this modern conception resulted in a loss of faith in humanity based on the collapse of the ideal of progress. This ideal, such as it was conceived during the Renaissance and subsequently put into effect by the Enlightenment,<sup>13</sup> referred to the constant and inexorable improvement of human beings towards more advanced stages of both their own existence and the existence of the world. Thus, from the idea of progress, the history of the world appeared to be marked by an optimism<sup>14</sup> based not only on the human capacity to perfect oneself and fulfill its own ideals, but also on the foreseen and imminent nature of the irruption of the supreme good in the world and its undeniable victory over evil and unreason. In other words, the way was conceived as open and without obstacles to achieve and realize the fulfillment of that ideal state of humanity, initiated by his own faith in progress. In this way, the ideal of progress made it possible to link objective knowledge, that is, rational knowledge of reality, with humanity’s own pretensions, namely, its desire to perfect nature and to free it from necessity, as if the realization of the empirical causes at stake in the world could be broken by the simple consideration of freedom and its historical unfolding articulated in an abstract and universal perspective.

This faith in the predetermined and inexorable character of the supreme good and its influence on the world and on history was even maintained in liberal or socialist conceptions of existence. Additionally, this faith was promoted for the simple reason that both of them held to the belief that the state of necessity (empirical conditioning) of existence not only had to but could be overcome easily. The almost automatic leap from the



realm of necessity to the realm of freedom promoted by both, liberalism and socialism<sup>15</sup> positioned them as utopian doctrines (Frank 1989, p. 18). Their utopian character was ultimately based on the desire to establish in consciousness the conviction that objectively known nature responds *de facto* to the human desire that good and reason become fully manifest in the structure of the intramundane being, as if the intramundane being were capable of progressively revealing the ideals of reason, including the realization of the supreme good in the world.

For Frank, however, it is not difficult to see how the European history of the 20th century has undermined this dogma of faith in human progress. It has brought about its irreversible crisis, showing not only how the perfection of mankind is far from linear in its process (Frank 1989, p. 19), but also the undeniable and bitter fact that great civilizations, based on consolidated spiritual principles, can easily decay into inconceivable states of barbarism over long periods of time (Frank 1989, p. 19). It has become an occasion—not a condition—for human beings to encounter once again that bitter truth which places them in front of the risk of their own exposure. This exposure is only due to the fact that the world seems neutral<sup>16</sup> towards everything that occurs, even when confronted by scenes of inconceivable and untold evils; namely, those evils that relate with oneself and that one realizes. In this sense, human beings tend more easily towards evil than towards the supposed supreme good effectuated, interdependent on their historical projection.

Nevertheless, this observation that humans are overcome by the spirit of evil is not only historical, sociological or political in character, but is fundamentally anthropological, for what is relevant for the constitution of the meaning of one's own existence is not exactly the facts themselves, but precisely the situation or the position that humans adopt facing the consideration of their own realization in the world. Here, it is not difficult to see how these facts come about most effectively when one allows oneself to be carried away by the spirit of hatred and complacency. In these facts, freedom, guided by its desire for transformation and for freeing from evil, aspires to become a factor in the intramundane reality, as if it—freedom—could be brought into existence in effective terms. It is as if it could directly realize all that it projects and at the same time eradicate the evil unassimilable with its own capacity for synthesis and assimilation.

In spite of all, the ontological structure of the world, which is rooted in evil, resists this exercise of freedom, founded on the ideal of humanity's progress. Moreover, it confronts the latter—freedom—with that impression which never ceases to come to consciousness and which acts in parallel with the insurmountable feeling that existence is given to us at every moment.<sup>17</sup> This impression is none other than the clear and distinct perception of a force that rules the world in a tenacious and obstinate manner: the force or forces of evil. These forces are somehow part of the immanent structure of the world. They constitute this immanence in its factual state of impenetrability.<sup>18</sup>

Human's faith in its ability to trigger the process of liberating itself from the forces of the world and of evil cannot overcome this state of impenetrability. Moreover, the transcendent intentionality of the good calls existence to maintain an eternal struggle with evil at stake in the immanence of the world and in human nature. However, this struggle must depart from the consideration of two fundamental aspects. The first is the triumphing over the structure of the world and the effective and excessive character of evil is not the destiny of good. In fact, its victory is not even guaranteed. This lack of guarantee suggests to the consciousness that the task of overcoming or defeating evil in the world is not an easy task, but a painfully difficult one (Frank 1989, p. 20). In this sense, the task must be presented to the subject with the utmost gravity. Even more so, we cannot be sure when this battle will end. Secondly, the necessity, importance or value of this struggle is presented as inversely proportional to the clear and distinct perception that evil is increasingly rooted in the structure of the world. That is, the greater the expression of evil, the greater the depth that evil acquires within immanence—to the extent of questioning the possible action of the good—the greater the disposition to struggle. Such a struggle in its perpetual maintenance does not require humans to abandon themselves to their own despair or to surrender to the

destruction of their own forces. Rather, it calls for a kind of patience that translates into the courage to take on one's own life as it is given without neglecting or omitting the sober perception of the present state of things. Accordingly, human existence, its capacity for meaning, must always be exercised from the heroic willingness to assume a vital meaning that is neither nourished by illusion and cowardice, nor by cynicism. It is as if the good for humans and the world could be derived from the conjunction or assumption of evil forces. Human existence consists of letting oneself be increasingly challenged; namely, to find the good not alien to evil, but confronted with it, since we are immersed in this confrontation. We are both willing to let the good shine through in some way in the structure of the world, and to not excuse the good prematurely from evil and its powerlessness in the face of it.

In short, good wants to speak with evil. In fact, it inserts us into its confrontational dialogue with evil, not in order to justify or explain it, but to involve us in the active struggle against its rootedness in the world, in its protection from and against it. In this sense, the perfect good is impelled to adapt the living to the categories of the empirical being, showing itself and its indestructible alliance—by the way, anarchic<sup>19</sup>—with the human being as a force (Frank 1989, p. 45). This force, not being the predominant or most powerful force, is present when it comes to fight against the empirical dominance of evil in the world and its capacity to alter or traumatize the dynamisms of the world and human existence itself. It is here that the all-powerful force of divine grace reveals its kenotic character, taking on the form of a “slave” (Frank 1989, p. 45) destining itself and destining the various subjects incorporated into its dynamism to a confrontation whose resolution is often not victory, but the fact of being overcome. In other words, the good leads us to a growing and limitless exposure that can lead reason to the confines of madness, the madness of a good that not only maintains itself in its transcendence, but, noticing evil, wants the human existence to maintain a relentless struggle with it in order to protect the world from its ever deeper, ever more deeply rooted unfolding.

#### 4. The Empire of the Diabolical: The Crisis of Humanism

However, the exposure and resistance of the living, incited by the good, to the unfolding of an evil that is increasingly rooted in the ontological structure of the world has, according to Frank, taken on a unique character in the peculiar spiritual problems of our time. Not only have the dramatic events of the twentieth century called into question human's unshakeable faith in progress. We are today witnessing a deeper fracture in the heart of conscience: the crisis of faith in man (Frank 1989, p. 21) reflected by the crisis of secular enlightened humanism. This crisis of faith in man harbors the possibility of a diabolical intentionality which both forges the illusion of being able to take advantage of the creative force of evil and allows the possibility of a catastrophic evil to occur in history. Thus, the understanding of the genesis of this intentionality—the root of which lies in the crisis of faith in man that occurred within the development of secularist humanism—as well as its promotion by certain philosophical systems, especially Marxism and nihilism, will be the subject of detailed analysis in this section.

Faith in the priceless dignity of the human being and his calling to fulfill a high destiny on earth found its correlate or necessary realization in faith in the idea of progress. Nevertheless, we find the origin of this faith in Christianity's awareness of humans and their place in the cosmos. The Christian view of humanity concentrated or rooted the Old Testament idea of man as created as the image and likeness of God in the inextricable character of his *Godsonhood*<sup>20</sup>. According to this, humans owe their birth not to their coming into the world, but to their intimate relationship with Life,<sup>21</sup> and with God. In this sense, for Christianity, we are children of God. Our being comes from above, from the divine source. Hence, the strong insistence on the inalienable dignity of each and every human being.

Secular humanism quickly forgot the Christian source that consolidated faith in the human being. It even constructed its ideal of humanity in opposition to the Christian conception of humans as children of God. Thus, at the beginning of the modern era, the acquisition of a belief in human's capacity to account for himself and to construct

a reality in accordance with his high destiny was a kind of spiritual revolution<sup>22</sup> that liberated man from those forces (the medieval principle of authority, represented by the Church) that enslaved him and kept him subject to determinations since human beings were heteronomous to the spontaneous unfolding of their own existence. From this moment, modern humanism, which started in the Renaissance, emerged as the awakening of a quasi-religious movement which with “heroic fury” (Frank 1989, p. 21) proceeded to eliminate all difference between transcendent and immanent conceptions of life, reducing the former to the latter.

This process reached its culmination in the “French Enlightenment” of the 18th century, where faith in humans and religious belief came to oppose each other in an unbridgeable rupture. The theoretical treatment of man, promoted by the French materialists, which placed him in the realm of nature and subordinated him to its dynamisms<sup>23</sup>—not exempt of blind and irrational forces—contributing decisively to the deepening of this rupture. In spite of this, the dialectics in considerations of man’s being was maintained: while human behavior could be universally explained by selfish motives, humans still occupied a primary place in the hierarchy and order of the universe. He was not merely a part of the natural world. Their rationality, expressed in their moral conscience (Frank 1989, p. 22), made it possible to believe that they were not decisively influenced by the blind and arbitrary dynamisms of nature.

Darwinism, however, decisively challenged this belief, leading to its collapse. Supported by considerable empirical evidence, Darwinism posited the consideration that the human being is ultimately just another fact or datum of the natural world, a relative or descendant of the ape (Frank 1989, p. 23), but in no way an exception or singular case in front of nature.

The teachings of psychoanalysis corroborated this idea. For psychoanalysis, it was no longer just a question of human beings considered as mere natural beings, but precisely that blind, chaotic and unconscious forces rule their supposed inner life. That is, our conscious life is not determined by any conscious element. Rather, consciousness is at the mercy of instinct, whose opacity cannot make transparent or produce coherence, balance, or harmony.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the fact that theoretical knowledge of human nature rendered impossible the objective substantiation of its special dignity, secularism humanism managed to maintain the belief and faith in man’s self-founded dignity on the basis of the numerous benefits or social conquests that are brought with it. Under its influence, individual rights, political freedoms, the abolition of slavery and social rights that would shape the future Welfare State were enshrined (Frank 1989, p. 23).

The internal contradiction of secularism humanism running through its entire approach could not face the decisive question that affects the meaning and scope of all human life; for in what sense can a being that is subject to the forces of nature and that is only a product of its dynamism claim for itself a capacity to assert and dissociate itself from everything that surrounds it? Is it not ironic that a more or less evolved ape is responsible and capable of giving its life for others, of putting the interests of others above its own (Frank 1989, p. 24)?

Facing these questions, the critical spiritual state that afflicted the faith of secularist humanism became apparent. This state could not be sustained over time. It required not only a practical but also a theoretical resolution, given its contradictory and incoherent character. This resolution involved recognizing a human’s right to follow its nature apart from any ideal that separates, singles out or abstracts him from the order of the world. Not only could humans act egotistically, but it was also necessary to do so freely in order to manifest what they are within the world. This ultimately constitutes their right to express what they are in what there is.

However, the spiritual resolve that eventually swamped the pretensions of secularist humanism came from the hands of both Marxism and nihilism.

Marx's doctrine contains one of the most forceful theoretical attacks on the humanist faith, despite his explicit postulation or commitment to the idea of progress. This is due to Marx's conception of nature: nature tends towards evil and greed (Frank 1989, p. 24). This assessment is based on the observation—also empirical—that in the distribution of goods, human beings are inclined to appropriate what does not belong to them. That is, they behave in a greedy way, giving rise to dissymmetry between rich and poor and favoring the struggle for the possession of goods. However, this assessment does not yet reveal the most conflictive point of the doctrine that Marx proposes when it comes to accounting for man's relationship with himself, with others and with the world around him.

The most conflicting point of the Marxist doctrine lies in the postulation that only the unfolding of this evil under the titanic effort to neutralize it—to reduce the singularity of the individual to its expression in a totality—will lead to the attainment of a fully socialist state, a realm where reason will ultimately rule, as a factor with real and effective influence. The creative forces of evil (Frank 1989, p. 25) play in this light an irreplaceable role in the attainment of the supreme good, which cannot be achieved without appeal to conflict and the dissolution of the individual into an impersonal element, that is, to the State.

The State has to guarantee the cancellation of all individual differences in the belief that its totalizing deployment will allow the triumph of that dimension by which humans try to acquire possession of themselves in the consciousness of their full performance. However, in this way, a flagrant disproportion is established between the ends of humanity (the realization of the supreme good in the world) and the means to achieve it, which, on the other hand, end up demanding the sacrifice of each and every human, required by the renunciation of the consideration of his or her own uniqueness. Thus, Marxism, in the practical application of its idea of humanism, helps to cultivate in man an immoral disposition (Frank 1989, p. 25). This disposition understands evil as a factual power of which man can take advantage in order to realize the good in effective and non-ideal terms, thereby enclosing it—the good—within the confines of its intramundane deployment. This is the ultimate root of Marxist anti-humanism: nothing can escape the realization of the supreme intramundane good. Even evil is subject to its dynamism, a dynamism which in turn justifies it.

On the other side, nihilism, embodied by Nietzsche, revealed the contradiction inherent in the conceptions of secular humanism. It is not possible to cultivate faith in humans whose empirical nature, which shows itself objectively in the world, is in no way commensurate with the secular human's claim to himself, i.e., their attempt to assert their position or superiority and thus to realize their high destiny in the face of the constraints of nature. Nietzsche's intuition was based on the idea that this man could not be the one to realize this high destiny by himself. Humans as such had to be overcome in order to achieve themselves in what they are, that is, in the exercise of his own aristocratic disposition to receive himself from his capacity to transcend. This is the spirit behind the idea of superman. Superman is one in whom the transcendence of the human being is not reflected in a self-founded ideality in the consciousness that considers it, but in the intimately felt need to receive oneself already in one's own condition of transcending. In that sense, Nietzsche comes to conceive of a divine-human (Frank 1989, p. 25) essence in the human being.

However, the Nietzschean paradox lies precisely in the fact that the aristocratic disposition not to believe in an abstract transcendence—however objectively conceived—but to immerse oneself in the movement of one's own reception, cannot be realized without ceasing to refer to the biological foundation of existence. This biological foundation plays a fundamental role in the consecration of Superman. From this point of view, the power that unfolds through greed, cruelty and self-indulgence to the detriment of others is not only not to be avoided, but welcomed and enhanced<sup>25</sup> precisely in order to promote the dynamics of self-transcendence that will bring about the ultimate arrival of Superman.

In other words, in Nietzsche, the empirical evidence of evil must acquire the force of a transcendent expression for the individual. In this sense, evil must abandon, in consciousness, its dimension of factual-empirical domain precisely in order to incorporate

itself into the life of an existence that does not set limits to its realization. In short, for Nietzsche, subjectivity must surrender itself to the capacity of evil to transform its reality and make it bear fruit. Therefore, it is not only a question of the living being empowering evil, but of its incarnation favoring or evidencing its revelatory power of self-manifestation. In this way, the transcendent intentionality of the good would be violated. Another intentionality of a diabolical nature, based on the bestial exercise of one's own condition (Frank 1989, p. 26) would end up preventing and rendering inoperative the exercise of resistance to the action of evil, that is, that dialogue with its excessive character which neither justifies nor sanctions it, but contrarily condemns and exposes it. This is the kind of intentionality that nihilism leads us to in its stark exercise.

Thus, endorsing the revelatory character of evil without referring it to the transcendent intentionality of the good makes evil acquire the character of an event, not only by virtue of its capacity to increasingly distort relations in the empirical world, but namely by virtue of its capacity to take root ever deeper in the human heart, allowing evil to assume proportions unforeseeable and unacceptable for human existence. Through Nietzschean nihilism, evil no longer belongs solely to the ontological structure of the world. It can and does inhabit—to an increasing degree in almost inexplicable qualitative leaps—the interiority of the human being. It breaks through to the extent of being able to reverse in it the exposure to the occurrence of good and replace it, in turn, by the exposure to the occurrence of evil, whose dynamism, accepted and assumed, leads the world to sink into a “sea of blood and tears” (Frank 1989, p. 27) under the diabolical belief that a higher state of humanity will emerge from such a sanction of evil. In short, from my surrender to its creative-destructive force.

Instead of the “here I am” that arises from the consciousness willing to let itself be questioned by what is different from itself; namely, the different modalities of otherness (including the possible otherness of evil in its excessive yet confrontational character), emerges the “Ecce homo”<sup>26</sup> of a being that has integrated the breakdown of meaning (the dark, blind and irrational forces of evil) into its own dynamisms of appropriation. He has not only self-mystified it, but it has sought his own self-satisfaction. His selfhood has found reasons for complacency in the evil phenomenon. It has even harbored within itself the belief that this gives it a greater power to know reality and to become itself. After all, good cannot know evil in the sense of integrating it. Its powerlessness therefore manifests in the face of the world.

This belief makes evil take root in the depths of the human heart. In the human heart, evil no longer appears in its mere excessive dimension. In fact, its excess exceeds itself to the point of affecting (reduplicating) those nooks and crannies of human existence where both facticity and the possibility of new supra-absences of meaning are present, altering the ontological structure of the world and the very way in which human beings conceive their relationship with themselves; namely in their capacity to articulate and spell out the meaning of their own existence.

In any case, the entrenchment of this belief, in turn, raises the question of whether the revelation of the perfect good can ever be undermined in the human being. In a way, it is true and even more appropriate to say and point out that the good and its relation to the human being is somehow overcome by evil when it penetrates the human heart in the way we have described. It is not only that it becomes just another force within the facticity of the world, but that the human conscience cannot help but regard it as weaker. Good is destined to suffer as a result, and, to an increasing degree, face the empirical rule of evil and its deep rootedness in the human heart. In it, there is room for the movement of a self-revelation that evidences the absence of the surrender of the good (in the world) and speaks to us of a self-mastery that forges in the human being the illusion of evil as a resource to invest in the perfection of one's own essence.

This teaching takes on the tinge of the diabolical utopianism sponsored by nihilism and also, in part, by Marxism. Its cynical faith in a man given over to the creative forces of evil points to the unfolding of a history marked by the impotence of good facing the unexpected



character of evil. In its worldly diabolic realization, evil appears more unexpected than good itself in the fundamental alterations it introduces into existence (time, the other, death, etc.). It is for this reason that diabolic utopianism points us in the direction of the diabolic man, that figure in which the idea of evil that destroys existence has not only occurred, but, fundamentally, is that which is yet to come, and is made concrete. Moreover, the crisis of faith in humanity has revealed its ultimate meaning and possibility in the emergence of diabolical humanism that has led and is leading humanity to the edge of the abyss, that is, the creation of a generation of victims of abuse and torture.

## 5. Conclusions

These considerations allow us to establish a brief description (but not a definition) of the phenomenological essence of evil, as it appears in experience. According to this description, evil could not be an essential principle. It is, rather, a factual reality—empirically verifiable—which, in its excessive condition, overtakes experience (catches it by surprise) and calls into question the human capacity to give meaning to reality. In this sense, evil is conceived as the breakdown of meaning facing its operative and active facticity, since it leaves its undeniable (evident) stamp on the empirical framework of worldly relations.

On the other hand, evil finds its most disturbing echoes in the human consciousness, which not only can, but often boosts this facticity in its dealings with others or with itself, preventing the realization in them or in oneself possibilities that cannot be deduced from the empirical—and evil—articulation of the world. The possibility of diabolical intentionality, ultimately revealed in the victim's experience, is sufficient proof of this. We can draw the following conclusions from this description of evil: As Levinas argues in his dialogue with Nemo, the excessive and transcendent condition of evil speaks to us of the need to account for it in its dialogue with the good or in the human being's question for the ethical difference. The maintenance of this difference helps human beings to develop a particular spiritual penetration in order to deal with reality. This penetration does not explain evil but exposes us to it and thereby condemns it. Nor does it confuse it with suffering or its unbearable. True evil occurs when human beings do not practice a calm and sober resistance in the face of its empirical evidence, which is aimed at protecting the world and the other, rather than maintaining a good conscience. In short, radical evil is related to the fact that *I* become the cause of the infinite despair of the other. As Frank points out, the historical deployment of evil in the 20th century clearly shows its effectiveness within intra-worldly relations and even in the midst of culturally advanced societies. It shows us how the ontological structure of the world and of the human being in the midst of the world is increasingly impenetrable to the action of the good. In fact, the good appears in it as another force, the least effective, destined to suffer permanent confrontation with darkness. There is no guarantee of triumph in this confrontation. The human being is called to participate in this confrontation. The belief that human beings can achieve their true fulfillment through the deployment of the creative forces of evil allows the gestation of a diabolical intentionality. Such diabolical intentionality has the capacity to make the reality of evil effective not only in the empirical world, but also in the realm of the human heart. When evil takes possession of the human heart, and the human being takes full control of himself, malignity takes on the features of an unexpected event capable of altering existence to the point of reducing it to pure suffering, to pure flesh, without the capacity for transcendence.<sup>27</sup>

All of these considerations lead to the generation of a peculiar disposition (spiritual penetration) that both exposes and condemns evil and protects the world from its growing influence. Finally, I believe that the journey through the thoughts of Philippe Nemo, Emmanuel Levinas and Semen Frank allows us to assess the necessity, suprarationality, and humanity of this disposition.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> As Simone Weil points out, there is no ontological way to reconcile good and evil, because “good is essentially distinct from evil”. (Weil 1991, p. 132).
- <sup>2</sup> Intentionality would no longer be “the centripetal movement of a consciousness that aspires to coincide with itself, to be itself, to confirm itself, to consolidate itself, to substantialize itself”. (Levinas 1978, p. 83).
- <sup>3</sup> This malignity is related to the phenomenological access to evil that we are proposing. This access is based on the consideration of evil as excess. In this sense, the specific character of evil cannot be assimilated. The effort made by consciousness to synthesize evils that affect existence gives rise to a confusion between the notion of evil and suffering. It would be as if the anguish experienced in the flesh due to illness and death were the true evil, or as if it would allow us to account for the essence of malignity. Thus, in this perspective, evil would be nothing but suffering. However, evils experienced in the flesh are a perception or symptom of evil, but they can never be considered as true evils. (García-Baró López 2006, p. 43).
- <sup>4</sup> That is why Levinas says: “While the notion of excess immediately evokes the quantitative idea of intensity, evil is excess in its quiddity”. (Cfr. Nemo 2001, p. 153).
- <sup>5</sup> The intentionality of evil is the genuine perception that the excessiveness of evil is unfailingly related to the transcendent character of an unconditional good. This relation invites the consciousness to live exposed to the dynamism of evil in order not to justify evil or explain it. As a result, in the middle of evil, I perceive that something or Someone is looking for me precisely to expose and condemn it (Nemo 2001, p. 157).
- <sup>6</sup> In this sense Levinas points out that the soul, which is awakened by evil, does not return to the reality of a being in the world, of an empirical or transcendental consciousness equal to the world in its desire inclined to satisfaction. (Nemo 2001, p. 160).
- <sup>7</sup> Nemo refers to this as an “essential” disorder that dwells in the domain of the finite. (Nemo 2001, p. 83).
- <sup>8</sup> “One for whom the idea of a Christian European mankind, the Christian world, is not an empty word cannot suppress in himself the penitent awareness that this Christian world as a whole is responsible for the moral catastrophe that has befallen it”. (Frank 1989, p. 13).
- <sup>9</sup> “The anti-Semitism of the 20th century, culminating in the extermination of six million European Jews, has meant for Jews the crisis of a world that Christianity had shaped for twenty centuries (...) Now, the fact that the monstrosity of Hitlerism took place in an evangelized Europe broke in the Jewish spirit that which Christian metaphysics could have had of plausibility for a Jew accustomed to a close proximity to Christianity: the primacy of supernatural salvation over earthly justice. Is it not this primacy that has resulted in so much disorder on earth and that extreme expression of human negligence?” (Levinas 2012, pp. 243–44).
- <sup>10</sup> In that sense, the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno, points out that the Jews worshiped their God “as a living force, not as a metaphysical entity (...) he was the god of battles”. (Unamuno 2011, p. 101).
- <sup>11</sup> It is relevant here the concept of *logos* promoted by ancient philosophy. As Walter Kasper points out, “in Greek philosophy, the concept of *logos* was used since Heraclitus in order to express the intrinsic rationality and unity of meaning of all reality. The *logos* is the reason that governs and unifies the whole of reality. (Kasper 2013, p. 300).
- <sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, St Thomas, in the *Summa Theologica*, goes so far as to affirm explicitly that everything that happens in the world is contained in the divine and providential order: “since God is the universal first cause, no longer of a single genus, but of all being, it is impossible for anything to happen outside the order of divine government. In fact, by the very fact that something appears to fall outside the order of providence in part, by reason of a particular cause, it necessarily falls within this same order by reason of another particular cause”. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 103.
- <sup>13</sup> The ideal of progress became relevant in the philosophy of history proposed by Joaquim de Fiore with his historicist conception of the Holy Spirit as the principle of historical progress. The Joachimite ideas were later and rapidly secularized. Additionally, “we find them again, transformed, in Lessing, Kant, Hegel, Schelling and Marx until we arrive at the disastrous dream of the Third Reich”. (Kasper 2013, pp. 330–31).
- <sup>14</sup> Semen Frank calls this optimism “historical optimism”. (Frank 1989, p. 17).
- <sup>15</sup> From the Russian philosopher Solovyov’s point of view, even socialist utopianism, despite its inconsistencies, would be more justified than liberalism, for the former “aspires to be a moral force, it claims to realize unconditional justice in the sphere of social relations”. On the contrary, liberalism promises to bring about the realization of the supreme good—the kingdom of freedom—in the world without assuring the necessary means for all individuals. (Solovyov 2006, p. 22).
- <sup>16</sup> The horrible and neutral “il y a” (there is) outlined by Emmanuel Levinas and Michel Henry. (Levinas 1983; Henry 2000).
- <sup>17</sup> Michel Henry has called this the non-extatic and insurmountable embrace of Life to the living. (Henry 1996, p. 283).

- 18 “If there is a life-conviction that dominates all of us it is the involuntary, bitter, but indelible impression- diametrically opposed to the recent faith in predetermined progress- that the world is characterized by its stubbornness in evil, that evil is an enormous terrible force that dominates the world and is somehow immanently characteristic of the world”. (Frank 1989, p. 20).
- 19 Anarchic is an expression borrowed from the philosophy of Levinas. It qualifies the modality in which the alliance of the human being with the perfect good takes place, namely, before or independently of the capacity of human subjectivity to account for it and to submit it to its transcendental conditions of meaning (Levinas 1978, p. 8).
- 20 Godsonhood is the technical concept used in the Ohio University Press translation of Semen Frank’s book “Light Shineth in the Darkness” ‘ to refer to the divine filiation of human beings or our kinship with the divine nature (Frank 1989, p.21).
- 21 This is why Michel Henry insists so much on the engendered and uncreated character of human life. (Henry 1996, p. 100).
- 22 As Solovyov points out, an important event in bringing about this revolution was Martin Luther’s Protestant Reformation, which laid the foundations for a conscious and free return to the religious principle. A process of gradual human liberation begins. (Solovyov 2006, p. 35).
- 23 Very useful and clarifying for understanding this process of subordination of the human being to its mechanically conceived nature is the theory of the human machine developed by the French materialist philosopher, Julien Offray de la Mettrie, in his famous work, *L’homme machine*. According to him, “The human body is a machine which winds its own springs. It is the living image of perpetual movement. Nourishment keeps up the movement which fever excites. Without food, the soul pines away, goes mad, and dies exhausted. The soul is a taper whose light flares up the moment before it goes out. However, nourish the body, pour into its veins life-giving juices and strong liquors, and then the soul grows strong like them, as if arming itself with a proud courage, and the soldier whom water would have made to flee, grows bold and runs joyously to death to the sound of drums. Thus, a hot drink sets into stormy movement the blood which a cold drink would have calmed”, (Offray de La Mettrie 1995).
- 24 Thus, Freud, in accounting for the movements of conscious life, appeals to his notion of the “effective unconscious”, according to which the entire dynamism of the psyche is determined outside the realm of what can be represented. (Freud 1968, pp. 275–76). Michel Henry has made an interesting approach to Freud’s theory in the following book: *Généalogie de la psychanalyse* (Henry 2015, pp. 343–86).
- 25 For example, in Nietzsche’s book, *The Gay Science*, we can find the following invitations or praises addressed to cruelty: “Where cruelty is needed.—He who has greatness is cruel to his virtues and secondary considerations” (& 266); Holy cruelty.—A man holding a newborn in his hand approached a holy man. ‘What should I do with this child?’ he asked; ‘it is wretched, misshapen, and doesn’t have enough life to die’. ‘Kill it!’ shouted the holy man with a terrible voice; ‘kill it and hold it in your arms for three days and three nights to create a memory for yourself: thus you will never again beget a child when it is not time for you to beget’. When the man had heard this, he walked away disappointed; and many people reproached the holy man because he had advised cruelty; for he had advised killing the child. ‘But is it not cruller to let it live?’ said the holy man (& 73). (Nietzsche 2008, pp. 76, 151).
- 26 Following Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo” is he who knows the joy of annihilation to a degree that corresponds to his power to annihilate. (Nietzsche 1911, p. 133).
- 27 In order to understand the monstrous capacity of the diabolic evil, it is necessary to stop and listen to the testimony of the victims and their own reflections, such as those collected by Jean Améry in one of his following books: (Améry 2013).

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