REFLECTIONS ON EVIL

by

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The Lindley Lecture
The University of Kansas
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I

The Form of Evil

The evil that is most intimate in our experience is the evil we ourselves do, active evil, not the passive evil we suffer. Of passive evils we know many. We undergo them in sickness, suffering, and death, in being the victims of the active evil of others, as when we are deceived, cheated, dealt with cruelly in body or spirit, or tyrannized over by the powerful.

Again, it is personal evil that we know intimately, the evil you and I do, as compared with the more massive evil we do in our corporate existence, as when a race, sex, class, or caste oppresses its counterpart, or as when a powerful nation becomes involved in an ever-degenerating use of its power to impose its will on a weaker one—although there is no doubt that we bear personal responsibility for our share in these active social evils.

For our present reflections, active personal evil is the most appropriate. For this is the evil into which we enter from within our innermost being, and in which we manifest outwardly the truth of our own depravity. It is the form of evil we are best fitted to comprehend by experience and insight.

Now personal active evil in its clearest form is moral evil. It is the evil done by an individual who freely violates his obligations, not merely his legal obligations but rather his moral obligations. To be sure, legal crime, such as robbery, violation of contract, rape, murder, or at the other extreme, the violation of a parking regulation or highway speeding, embodies something like a transgression of morality. Murder violates what most of us would take, following the commandment not to kill, as being itself a moral law; and further, every one of these crimes, just because it violates law itself, has within it, if not moral evil unqualified, nevertheless something akin to moral evil.

Still, the law that is violated might be immoral, as in laws permitting the exploitation of child labor or of racial distinctions, or it might be largely indifferent to morals, as in laws about parking or driving on one side of the street. Crime consists in the violation of law as law, not of the law as either moral or immoral, and so it cannot be a purely moral violation. This means that the one who does it is being viewed, not as a genuinely particular person, but as

3

a mere legal personage, a generalized rather than a particular individual, whose character does not otherwise matter and is irrelevant to the fact of his committing or not committing the crime. From the law's viewpoint we are not criminals with our whole self; we could be pure as saints and still be guilty of parking in the wrong place, of violating a contract, and even (your imagination is called on to invent the circumstances) of rape or of murder.

But philosophical reflection on essential evil cannot be satisfied with anything less than the evil that stems from the concrete person, the doing of which expresses the person's specifically moral will and effort. To such evil, common language gives names like vanity, enmity, malevolence, envy, ingratitude, disrespect, selfishness, gluttony, impiety, idolatry. . . .

In these, the individual does something, to some degree knowingly and willingly, which he is in some degree convinced that he ought not to do. He knowingly and willingly does the opposite of what he is convinced he should do. When, for example, he is idolatrous, or ungrateful, or vain, he knowingly and willingly worships where he understands he ought not to worship, refuses thanks where he knows that they are due, or gives his own self a prominence which he is convinced it really should not receive.

In this moral sense, evil is the free violation of duty. It is free, first, in the sense that I know what I am doing and do it voluntarily. The act is my act, not merely imputed to me by others, but self-imputed: I constitute myself the author of it. Secondly, it is free in the sense that the duty in the phenomenon is not merely an obligation imposed from the outside. I have to be convinced that the obligation is truly my obligation. The citizen who refuses to be drafted into the army to fight abroad, because his conscience tells him that war is morally wrong, whether war generally or some war in particular, violates what many others might consider his true obligation. But his own act, inward and outward, does not bear the mark of authentic evil: he is not violating what he is convinced is a duty, but quite the contrary, for he is convinced that resistance is itself precisely his duty. From his viewpoint his action is good, not evil. And when we comprehend his mentality, we understand this moral quality of his behavior, whether or not we agree with his specific conviction. He is freely violating what he sees as an unjust imposition rather than a genuine obligation. He is not knowingly and willingly doing the opposite of what he is convinced he ought not to do.

4

Violence committed by an individual belonging to an oppressed minority against members, property, and institutions of the dominant majority offers an illustration of how intermixed good and evil become in real life. Although we can never rule out of the act of violence the possibility of some degree of actual malevolence, nevertheless the actor is able to view his act as a stroke for freedom against the evil of the oppressor. In the purest case, in which out of sheer desperation black men band together to defend themselves according to their best lights against oppression and to struggle for freedom by available means—and hence by violence when they are excluded from normal influence through a place in government—their action has certainly for them and for much of their community the meaning of good. A white moralist might argue that blacks, in restricting their loyalty first to their own community rather than to the whole, are involved in a form of social evil. But the argument holds equally against those whites who hypocritically speak for all mankind while serving their own community. Hypocrisy itself is one of the arch forms of evil, and the black could reply that in fighting for his community he advances the cause of the whole of mankind as well. In any event, it is hard enough for any of us to escape hypocrisy, hard enough to be unambiguously good.

A clearer case of opposing views of good and evil is that of the anti-social actions of ghetto gangs, criminal bands, outlaw families, who have their own loyalties, their own intrinsic codes of morality, who consider normal society and its population as enemies, just as one nation does another hostile nation. Here an act against the dominant society has the meaning of an act of heroism, of the local patriotism which counts on faith in the group and its values. Within the outlaw group one meets with what, in the larger world, goes by the name of virtue: helpfulness, sympathy, charity, devotion to the fulfillment of real bonds of obligation. And because the gang actualizes its attitude to the outer world through violation of that world's principles and by means that are often violent, this violence is also easily turned inward upon the errant gang member, who is treated less leniently sometimes than he would be in the larger world. The enforcement of interior morality is sanctioned by violence, too.

In true moral evil the actor is convinced that the norm he violates is morally right. He is convinced that he is setting himself against what he ought to do, intentionally doing what he ought not to do. Evil cannot exist as active save in and through this active

opposition to what is perceived as good and right. If I see a child being brutally mistreated by a man and if I nevertheless consult my own safety and turn aside, there is already an evil quality of selfish cowardice in my behavior. If I positively encourage the brute then there is something more intensely evil in my behavior, a distinct malevolence involving a more active opposition to good. We comprehend evil more distinctly by meditating on the latter case than on the former. Active evil is free positive negation of what is perceived as right and good.

Note that evil has two major components: a) the violation, knowingly and willingly, of what is perceived as obligation, and b) the specific duty violated. The glutton violates the clear duty of resisting animal impulse and caring for his own bodily welfare. The selfish person violates the clear duty of treating others as ends and 'not as mere means. In each case there is the general formal factor to which the quality of evil primarily attaches itself. I am evil in treating another as a mere means to my own interest, not just because I have done him some particular harm, for then I should merely have damaged him in that particular way, but rather because, realizing that to treat him as a mere means is to violate the obligation of respecting him for what he is, I nevertheless do it. Evil is precisely this contradiction in will and action of what I am convinced is right and good.

Clearly there is a real perversity in the structure of the evil will. I pit my will against what, simultaneously, I am convinced my will ought to be for. I repudiate what I acknowledge as obligatory, without ceasing to acknowledge it as such. My acknowledgment of the duty to care for my own health is not a merely theoretical recognition; if it were, there would be less evil in my act of gluttony. What makes it evil is the fact that my will is involved. When I recognize my obligation, I have a personal existential knowledge of my will's being bound to the good; I experience the obligation as a call upon my will; I hear it and feel it as an appeal and a demand, a pull, and indeed a rightful pull upon me; and nevertheless, I violate it. The ought has to be a real ought, not a merely ideal one. It is what my will, as a will, knows.

Paul complained that he did not understand his own actions:

> For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which

dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. (Romans, 7.15ff)

We see that Paul did not acknowledge himself here as evil, but placed the evil in the sin that dwelt within him, in his flesh. He himself, as he went on to say, had only good intentions in his mind; it was the alien element of sin within his body that worked evil:

For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans, 7.22ff)

We get the picture here not of an evil man acting malevolently but of a good man assailed by a maleficent principle that has lodged in that part of him, the body and its members, which is open to invasion.

Had Paul been describing genuine evil, such as could belong to his own inmost self and not just to his flesh, he would have observed that, while he delights in God's law in his inmost self, that very same self is at war with itself, wants what it does not want, and does not want what it wants, and, in the struggle, wins out against itself in favor of the negative. He would have grasped himself as a genuinely ambivalent being, wanting to violate the very divine law in which he delights, contrary and perverse in his nature, proceeding to the perpetration of the violation from out of his intermost core.[1]

Evil is like that childhood perversity, that infantile negativism, which says no to the parent just because the parent gives the command or wants the action. The child triumphantly dashes his cup on the floor, pitting his will against what he recognizes to be the authoritative will of the parent. He asserts himself. The beginnings of the possibility of evil are becoming visible, for the child already experiences the war of self with self, that inner self-tearing, in

7

which the nay-saying side finally wins out. But the child is still testing himself; the evil man, further advanced, enters into negation with the developed authority of his own self, understanding more fully the dimensions and implications of his action, and therefore more serious in his evil-doing.

This perversity of will is the essential form of evil. The more explicitly I realize that I am acting against what I am convinced is the good—convinced in heart, soul, and will, not merely in intellect—the more definitely and purely evil is my act.

An important distinction within this context is that between formal and material evil. For there may be, first, an evil which exists mainly for its own sake as evil, not being specially concerned about the damage that is done to the victim or object. I can be evil in a pure disinterested way. I am concerned dominantly to realize my own potentiality for evil, as such. I want to oppose the good just because it is good, just in order to be evil. The victim is of secondary importance, a convenient necessity. It doesn't much matter to me whether I violate this duty or that, great or small, in regard to this person or that. It could be a lie told to this one, a cheating of that one, a betrayal of a third, a robbery of a fourth, torture of a fifth, and so on. Essential only is that it is I who am doing these deeds and, in each one, enacting my own being as opponent of good. With regard to the victim I maintain a psychical distance, disengaged from caring about him in particular (even if, at the same time, I know within myself the depth of true care).

Such evil is formal. Although it always has some material content, its essential meaning is subjective rather than objective. The meaning is: the form of evil, the inward contrariety of will against itself finally conquering as the positive negation of good. It is like abstract painting which, if it makes use of representable objects, does so for the sake of establishing the visual form rather than for the sake of presenting the object.

Evil is material, on the other hand, when done in connection with an emotion directed towards the object. Formal evil is indifferent to anything save its own practice of evil; material evil is not indifferent towards the victim. Emotions of enmity, hatred, resentment, malevolence, pitilessness, revenge, jealousy, envy, contempt, feelings of *Schadenfreude* and sadism—such emotions, when directed towards someone, breed evil intentions and evil deeds. And here the evil is not disinterested but aims at doing harm. If I am jealous of someone who has exceeded my own achievements

and attained a greater fame, if I resent his good fortune and at the same time elevate my own worth above him so as, at the same time, to look down upon him with contempt—you will, of course, readily recognize the syndrome—it is easy for me to think of wronging him, although I clearly know and feel deeply the wrongness of what I propose. It is hard not to be evil here, for the self that is the agent of evil has been wounded and wants revenge.

In formal evil, the act is pure wickedness; in material evil, malevolence gives color and body to wickedness. When malevolence becomes comprehensive, holding everything in its scope, it gains the universality of wickedness and adds to it the concreteness of its own object-directedness. And if, further, this generalized malevolence exists for its own sake, so that it is practiced not only out of antagonistic emotions towards its objects but also and essentially out of the positive will to *be* malevolent and in the self-enjoyment of malevolence, the peak of evil is reached. It is the kind of evil we personify in the Devil, the Enemy, Satan. Satan is the image of the unity of formal and material evil: material evil that has itself become formal, and formal evil which includes within itself the whole character of material evil. He is the identity of the form and matter of evil.

At its peak, evil breeds its own aesthetic. It experiences the beauty, the sublimity, and the novelty of the creation of the artist in evil. For the evil act can be so artfully wrought that everything in it fits in a perfect harmony of positive negation. It can be done on a great scale, so as to command awe in the face of the magnitude, depth, and power of spirit that perverts itself so utterly. And it can be done ever with an eye to something new, so that it might please through its sheer unexpectedness, or through the comic or grotesque shape it manifests. Only one who is hardened in evil is capable of such degrees of refinement. Novelty could even, in his case, include a sublime humor, in which the agent indulgently mocks himself, finding his outlet for evil in the self-destructive evil he does to himself, his evil expiring towards infinity in its own self-annihilation.

Fantasies of evil are made of this stuff.

II

The Content of Evil

If the form of evil is this inner perversity of will, what is its content? Language supposes that there is a genuine wrong intended. We know, on the other hand, that from the Sophists down to the popular Freudianism and Existentialism of our day, setting oneself against the dictates of conscience has been celebrated as a liberation, a throwing off of conventional restraints imposed on the individual by the outside world, beginning with the parents and extending through the society. To some, the resort to what is customarily called evil is like the fight of an oppressed minority against an oppressing majority, an heroic struggle against a foe that has been planted within, the superego. If only the repressive force of the superego, or of the collectivity, can be overcome, man can emerge in his own individual freedom, liberated to be the pure natural being he was in the beginning.

This picture of conscience as a repressive device, of human nature as originally innocent and good, of the pure assertion of the ego in its primal innocent nakedness, has a profound power of romantic attraction, as if, could we slough off civilization and the discontent that accompanies it, we could find our way back to the Eden of a pure beginning. But it omits the affirmative nature of obligation and of the complex concreteness of life which has to be built up in order for us to become human and live with one another in a common world according to our true nature as human.

True community cannot come about through return to an imaginary innocent communal sharing in the polymorphous perverse, as my colleague Norman O. Brown tends to believe, but only by the sharing—by persons who have passed over the threshold of suffering and keep the pain ever with them—of the complex of obligations, both duties and rights, required to make a genuinely free civilization. Freedom is eventual, not initial. It is reached, not by throwing off restraining bonds but by binding ourselves to keep together, by gathering ourselves into our mutual appropriation, in a genuinely achieved communion. The true dignity of man is attained only by building forms of life which are held together by the ties which tie freedoms to one another, ties which moral agents undertake the responsibility of keeping, and incur the

10

guilt of violating. If this means that we must learn to control natural appetites and passions so that they are allowed their proper place in the economy of life, then that consequence has to be accepted. It is part of man's finitude. For everything valuable we must pay a price. The question is only: Is what we get worth the price? Well—what *is* the price of humanity and human dignity?

To set oneself intentionally against the bonds which free beings need in order to realize their freedom is to commit a wrong. The truly evil man is not he who, with little feeling for these bonds, does not have a strong conscience and thus has little to fight against, but he who is genuinely convinced of the obligatory nature of these bonds, yet who sets himself against them anyway. The former does what is bad because he is underdeveloped and ignorant of true sociality; the latter does what is evil because he consciously acts against sociality. The former does not comprehend real relationship; the latter is an avowed enemy of real relationship.

As these observations imply, the answer to the question, "What is the content of evil?," is, at first and in one word, Vanity.

I mean by this, not ordinary vanity, like vanity about one's personal appearance or cleverness, but vanity of a more transcendent sort. It claims for itself even a certain absoluteness. The evil person acts as though he were an absolute in very truth, a particular absolute, to be sure, because he has to recognize the existence of other finite beings, but, in his finite particularity, an absolute nevertheless. Evil is the work of the self, and when it does this work it has to absolutize itself.

But I say "at first" because, while vanity represents the forefront of evil, its self-affirmative phase, it is evil's self-negating phase, covered over by vanity as a front, which is the essential content—namely, the rejection of the self's own truthful existence.

As human beings we are subject to vanity because we are subjects to whom there belongs freedom of choice, decision, and action as an essential quality. In order to have human meaning, my action must be not merely an automatic behavioral response but one that is mediated by thought and will. It is up to me to use or refrain from violence exerted on my neighbor. Automatic attack on him or flight from him does not yet have the meaning of genuinely human behavior; a rat or a cat does as well or better. If, then, I act violently towards him, by intention, my act embodies a specifically human meaning; it externalizes that meaning in the actual world.

11

What is the meaning of such an act?

To answer this question we have to understand the meaning of freedom, especially the moral freedom of choice, decision, and action, for it is clear that the meaning of the act of human freedom must lie in the meaning of freedom itself.

Our two basic words here, "freedom" and "liberty," carry two important aspects of the experience of freedom. The adjective "free" derives from Old English and associated Indoeuropean forms expressing *love* and *peace,* and all of these relate, presumably, to the assumed Indoeuropean root *prai,* meaning to protect, to spare, to save, to care for, to be fond of, to love. The Latin adjective "liber" means *free,* in the sense of one who acts according to his own will and pleasure, is his own master, is unrestricted and unrestrained; and it is connected with the form "libido," pleasure, desire, eagerness, longing, fancy, inclination. But it is probably related also to words in Old German and affiliated languages meaning *people,* as in the German *Leute,* as well as words meaning to belong to the people, to be free in the sense of being among the people to whom one belongs or to be one among a free people. Also associated are the Greek *eleutheros,* to be free, noble, and words referring to growth and to aftergrowth, the offspring generation. There are further connections as well, but these are enough to indicate the main outline of the area in which our languages have conceived the notion of freedom and formulated the experience of the peoples who speak them.[2]

What is the content of this experience? To be free is to be able to act according to my own will and pleasure, to be my own master, unrestrained and unrestricted. But it is more than that, for I cannot have this freedom unless I am with my own people, who will hold me in peace, protect me, save and care for me, and in the deepest sense, love me, and towards whom I behave in a reciprocal way. Moreover, they themselves have to be a free people, living as its own master, unrestricted, a noble people not an enslaved one. Such a people maintains its freedom in the historical continuity of the generations it produces, who belong to it and carry forward its destined task of providing the human world in which the new individual can grow up in peace and love, cherished, nurtured, protected, given the opportunity to be himself, and in his turn loving, cherishing, nurturing, protecting, and preserving the heritage of freedom for the generations that follow.

This is the basic experience of freedom which our language—

that is to say, our ancestry who kept to the speaking of it—has preserved for us to gather from it the necessary wisdom.

We can see the content of this experience if we reflect that to be with one's people, in the world of that people, while at the same time able to act according to one's will without restraint, is to be, in the very act of being with *other* human beings, precisely with one's *own*. There is a unity, even an identity, between one's own individual will and the communal will belonging to the people as such. What the community wills is what the individual wills and what he wills is what the community wills; they are in an accord of will; and this is what it means for the individual to be with a people as his own people and as one who is their own. Individual and community are own to one another, not in a foreshortened way, as when the individual is tyrannized over, terrorized by the community, or the individual is tyrant and terrorizer of the community, but in the fullest sense of ownness possible between an individual and his people, where the relationship is based on mutual trust, loyalty, care, and love.

This ownness-relationship between individual and community is the content of civic virtues, of genuine patriotism, citizenship, and participation in public life, and it supports the possibility of development of individuals who can freely share in the arts, religion, and thought of the culture, living by its wisdom. It is because the ownness-relationship between individual and community has grown significantly weaker in our country that, by a necessary consequence, the civic virtues have become more and more obscured, to the point at which, in certain circles, citizenship is taken as a joke.

Ownness, having as one's own and being own to, is the fundamental content of all human relationships as such. The expression "ownness" could be described (following the analogous usage of Russell in regard to logical constants) as a "systematically ambiguous" word. It means different things in different contexts, and yet there is a continuity that extends throughout the differences. In Hegelian language it would be called a "concrete universal" since, in order to develop its full meaning, it needs to unfold in a manifold differentiation which nevertheless constitutes an identity.

In man, this process of differentiative unity shows itself in the most articulate manner. Freedom is ownness, and if one of the several meanings of freedom, as in the Latin "liber," is desire and

eagerness, we could even say that man *is* the desire and eagerness that constitutes freedom.

The fundamental drive of human life is the drive of ownness: to be with what is other and alien as *not* being alien but as own. Every relationship which man tries to establish with what is other than himself is one in which he tries to establish a form of ownness. The attempt is not always pretty: an act of cruelty exercised on a victim is also an attempt to establish one's power over the victim and thereby to identify the victim as one's own possession, impressing on him the mark of one's own domination. Ownness is the substance of love but, just because it is that, it is also the substance of hate; it is susceptible of the most deformed and perverted violations of the spirit of love, because it *is* love; and part of the tragic meaning of life is that the negative as well as the positive aspects of ownness demand articulation.

Hunger is the need to appropriate a part of the external world to make into one's own body and to use its energy for one's own. Sexuality in its primary biological sense is the need to enact the reproduction of one's kind, one's own breed. The master-slave relationship, as Hegel describes it in the *Phenomenology of Mind,* develops out of the battle between two egos for recognition and acknowledgment: the one becomes the owner, the other the owned, the one the master and lord, the other the slave and bondsman. The slave owns—that is, acknowledges—his belonging to the master, not only in word but also in deed; the master owns him almost as he owns a thing. Legal property is an ownness-relationship between a legal person and a thing: the society acknowledges his right to the thing's possession and disposition, and it imposes on others the obligation of refraining from taking possession of the thing without due process. Psychologically, the legal ownness-relationship of property becomes a spiritual relationship in which the owner experiences, in his property, his own being extended beyond himself. He calls it "mine" as if his ego stretched beyond his skin and over the acres of his estate, the bodies of his automobiles, the shine of his silver service.

Beyond the legal relationship of owner and non-owner of property there are more intimate relationships of ownness among humans, as for instance those involved in the family. The children are the parents', the parents are the children's. It is my brother to whom I am brother or sister. We are all together one another's. But we belong to one another, not as things belong to property

14

owners (although sometimes, as in Rome, the relationship could approach this condition), but as one human being can belong to another—by mutual participation in a communal life-relationship. So too in a wider sphere our life is part of the life of a village, a nation-state, eventually of the human world and the history of that world. The manner of our participation in these determines the content of the ownness-relationship of individual to community. Nations themselves relate to others on the international level according to their own modes of ownness, in law and culture, war and peace, in trade, in the complexity of the whole world-historical process.

And beyond the structures of worldly ownness there are those that belong more purely to the human spirit as such, its expression and communication with transcendent reality in art, religion, and thought.[3]

At all levels of his life man seeks freedom, that is to say, seeks to be with other as with own. Sometimes the effort damages, or even destroys, the other, as in eating, rape, robbery, slavery. Sometimes the effort damages or destroys one's own life, as in self-sacrificial devotion and struggle for a cause. And there are forms of deviation in which, as in masochism, one seeks to rape the other into cruelty towards oneself, or as in a truly erotic sadism one seeks to embrace the other in love by means of the violent act. Then there is the partitive form of social ownness, as in racism, where one community closes into itself in a tight ownness and purposely excludes another community as alien, not-own: the alien community becomes the first community's own not-own, needed as a scapegoat or an object for hostility-behavior, in which oppression and the infliction of harm become relevant ways of imprinting the one's own mark on the other. The in-community's inner ownness is heightened by its identification of the out-community's otherness. The phenomenon of the external threat used to build up a nation's solidarity and war-willingness is a similar phenomenon of partitive ownness.

The higher the mode of ownness we practice, the higher we are able to raise our practice of the lower stages. But also the perversion of a higher mode perverts the lower. Thus the sexual relationship can exhibit higher and lower forms of ownness. The freedom achieved by the rapist is of a low order, comparable to the master-slave relationship; and it is perverted because he treats the raped as a virtual thing, an object, a person who is a non-person. In genuinely communal love, the persons do not use one another merely

15

as love objects, to be thrown off afterwards, but share a meaningful experience of fulfillment.

We may note here that to have the most fulfilled and freest sexual relationship the partners must not be selfish. That is not to say that their selves must not be enhanced in it; quite the contrary, since communion always enhances the self. It means, rather, that they must not use one another as mere means to their own pleasure. Each has to acknowledge and fulfill obligations towards the other, not in a legal or formal way, but in the very sensitivity and tenderness of the relationship. Each has to acknowledge and undergo a bond on his or her abstract freedom, which otherwise would merely consult its own pleasure. True love is a concrete freedom. Here already, in the very core of the erotic experience, genuine morality begins to appear as necessary for the existence of the concrete freedom that forms the truth of the experience.

It is our fundamental instinct to seek freedom in its more and more concrete shapes. This freedom is found in ever-growing fullness in the articulation of the ownness-relationship, with things in the world, with our fellow humans, with the world as a whole, and with the transcendent and divine. The more we grasp freedom as ownness, the more we understand that the fullness of it lies, not in the mastery of the self over others, not in the possession by the self of things, not in victory, property, war, wealth, fame, power, but in what raises up and transfigures the force in these lower and more onesided forms to forms in which there is mutuality and reciprocity, equal to equal, in all the difference. The truest owness of sexuality is the kind partnership of love. The truest ownness of feeding is the sacredness of communion. The most important logical category for philosophical thinking about freedom is the category, not of substance, nor of cause and effect, but of reciprocity which, in its higher levels, is community and communion of real individuals.

With this brief sketch at hand of ownness as the content of freedom, we can now return to the question of the meaning of the vanity that constitutes evil. And we shall find, if we examine the vanity of evil from this standpoint, that it is itself a perverted form of ownness and freedom.

This vanity of evil belongs to the moral sphere. In the realm of morality, the moral judgment of right and wrong is left up to the individual, with his particular will. That is the essential meaning of morality. Whereas in law the determination of right and wrong is made by the legal authority—legislature, court, judge—and

16

whereas in communal forms of existence, such as the family, village, and nation, judgments of right and wrong are made by the community, in morals the individual himself is forced to decide whether a proposed action is right or wrong. The law may try to exercise its sanction upon him, and the various communities may try to do the same from their viewpoints, but in the end the individual has to take it on himself to make a decision, within his own breast, and to dare the action on which he decides. In the language of Protestantism he has to appeal to his conscience, the divine voice within him; in the language of the Enlightenment, he has to consult his reason; and there are other languages which men have used to describe the process. What is essential for our reflections, however, is that the individual is the final court of appeal, the ultimate yea- or nay-sayer, and therefore has ultimate responsibility which, if the judgment errs, becomes ultimate guilt.

In the moral sphere the individual subject is thrown on his own. In the positive sense, if he is a moral individual, he knowingly and willingly sets himself to do what in his conviction is right and good. He may be fearfully misled in other respects and his acts may turn out to harm his and others' welfare; but the specifically moral quality of his act depends on his knowing and willing performance in this rarefied sphere of individual judgment and decision. It is the self which is here of the essence.

Nevertheless, the moral man subjects this essential individuality to the authority of what he is convinced is right. He recognizes obligation as binding on his individual freedom. He is not compelled by anything outside—whether in the legal or the communal world—to perform his action. The force that determines the performance is the force of his own self. Yet he lets the self be bound by right. He acknowledges the rights of others to be the foundation of obligations towards them (or towards himself as other), and he lets himself be bound by these obligations. Through this knowing willingness, he articulates the specific form of union—of reciprocal ownness—characteristic of the moral sphere.

Ownness in the moral sphere is the reciprocal belonging of subjects to subjects by way of their free acknowledgment and realization of the oughts—the rights and obligations—needed to constitute their intersubjective freedom. The Kantian image of a kingdom of ends and developments out of it, like Buber's dialogical relationship, have helped to establish this conception of morality for the modern mind.

17

The moral man acts essentially as an individual, yet his action is the farthest thing from vanity. His self is the ultimate agent, but there is nothing selfish in what he does. Retaining his individuality, he transfigures it into identity with other individuality in moral community, this particular mode of the lonely binding of self with selves. By moral action a kind of mutual ownness or appropriation is opened up which is free, reciprocal, and constrained only by the infinitely fragile bond of free decision. By this bond we give ourselves as own to one another and grant ourselves a free community of own with own. Binding ourselves in freedom, we for the first time realize our freedom objectively in a world, not of natural things alone, but of selves: we make an objective spiritual community in which we share subjective freedom together.

Moral evil intentionally directs itself against this freedom-community. Suppose, out of envy, I permit myself to spread malicious gossip about my rival. The gossip may be true and that could make it all the more harmful to him. Already in this act of material evil I have negated a possibility of moral community. I decide against accepting one of the bonds of connection which constitute an objective moral world, withdraw from that world, alienate myself, practice as an enemy against it. I had allowed envy to obtain an influence on me, but I could even grow bolder and engage in a more resolute attack on moral community, searching for loopholes in its defenses where I might place mines of malevolence.

Like the moral man, I too act essentially as individual, but in the opposite direction. It is precisely I upon whom the responsibility lies to become one with the moral community or to estrange myself from it as an enemy. Unless I had this choice there could be no such thing as morality. If, then, I choose against moral community, it is I alone who have set myself against it. The content of my action is—I. It says—not we, but I. Not I with thee in a union of ownness, but I against thee, simply and solely as I in and with myself. I as essence. Vanity.

Since every one of us is evil in some way, every one of us knows the exaltation that comes when the self raises itself above community, confident in the strength of its own freedom. The action it performs is all its own, and the reverberations through the world, as the victim suffers, and beyond, also are its own—the wave that the evil self has started spreads from it as the center. The ego sees its motion expand through the world, carrying with it the meaning "mine, all my own." And it is proud. It has in this degree shaped

the world. If it could, it would like to see its power of impressing its own being on the world increase until nowhere could there be resistance to it. Nothing intrinsic to the vanity of evil sets a bound to its desire. As this singular particular ego, it wishes to be an absolute.

Now in the pursuit of its vanity the evil ego is seeking ownness, too. It is not as though it has set itself against ownness; that is impossible for an ego, since the very meaning of "I" is given only in terms of "mine." It is a question, rather, of the content of the "mine."

Vanity's mineness is the spread of the ego's solitary dominance over the resistance of the nonego. As vain, I seek to make every other into mine alone, thrusting down its own claim to its own. I seek to treat everything else in the way in which he who seeks to master another as slave wishes from him the acknowledgement that the master alone is the essential I and the slave's I is nothing but the master's.

Vanity seeks only the recognition of itself in its particular individuality as, nevertheless, counting for the selfhood of everything. It seeks to substitute its own individuality for the universal being of all selves. It treats others as mere means to the inflation of the I. Thus it seeks to substitute for the reciprocal ownness of moral community the nonreciprocal onesided ownness by which everyone and everything would confess to being the I's own, immediately and simply. It would like to govern the other as its own dependent rather than be with the other as own to own in equal reciprocity, that is, in the fraternity of moral community.

Evil is not revolt against ownness. It is the fight for a onesided ownness, as in the political sphere the aspiring tyrant fights to become the lord of the world.

19

III

The Doing of Evil

How is it that man wills evil?

Does he have a motive towards it, does he seek a gain through it? Must we not answer, yes, there is a motive and a gain, the same as in everything human: to attain to a condition of positive concrete freedom, of being with other as with own?

The dialectic of evil causes it to reject the other selves as own in a reciprocal moral way in order to make them own in the empty way of a onesided appropriation. Evil cannot accept the other as a moral brother. To accept him as own it has to transform him into a thinglike being. It exacts the sacrifice of the other's selfhood to its own need for the other to be its own. The untruth of evil is visible in this, that it takes the wrong thing to be the solution to its problem of ownness. Where the truth would lie in fraternity, it takes vanity to be true. But it does so because, by vanity, it can transform everything into its own, even if only by making it empty. Evil genuinely seeks freedom, but only the wrong condition of freedom.

Is this due to ignorance? If it were, would not evil lack something of evil? He who acts against the good not realizing that it is the good he acts against, is not evil. If the evil man saw only the realization of self as good and actually saw no wrong in his refusal of other selves, how could he rightly be called evil?

Evil, then, knows what it rejects. It knows the value and truth of the moral fraternity that constitutes the community of free obligation, and it nevertheless acts against it. Does it do so because it wishes to avoid the sacrifice of self entailed in being good? For one does have to surrender vanity and the vain possession of the world in order to enter into the kingdom of ends. But would not the truly evil self know that, in refusing to surrender vanity, it has sacrificed even more—the substance, dignity, truth, and worth that belong to moral fraternity?

How is it then that the evil self enters into evil and persists in being evil? Could we not say: just because it is proud and vain, because it fancies itself in its absoluteness? But is that an answer or is it not rather the question all over again?

The ego is indispensable. Without it ownness cannot exist in its

truth. The ego is the principle of ownness, for it is the ego's vocation to say: "That is mine and I am its own; we belong to one another." Only the ego, saying "mine," can go on to say "we" and "our." But for the ego to be able to say "mine, our," it must first be able to say: "not mine, not our, not thine." In its mere immediateness, the ego has only the power of saying: "I am mine." It must be able to turn outwards, finding there what is not its own, so as to be able to find the way to ownness beyond itself. It must say: "Thou art not mine, I am not thine," before it can arrive at the point of confessing: "I would be thine, pray be thou mine."

The ego must be free. That is the condition for the power to say no. In principle, while it can invest in its other, the ego can by the same token withdraw itself from any role it might assume towards the other. This is its radical freedom, which Hegel called its abstract freedom, and which, in *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre made over into a pure egoless, though not therefore selfless, freedom. In its abstraction the ego can achieve a certain absoluteness. If it pulls back from its investment in the external world, it has wrested itself free to be its own universal. The ego, as such, is a universal. It is present in every role it assumes yet is exhausted by no aggregate of them, but always capable of retracting itself into itself, to hover above them in its purity as the free potentiality of them all. At the same time it is a particular universal. You and I are situated differently, thrown into the world differently, with different bodies and capacities, while yet each of us exists as a pure universal freedom. Each is a limited unlimited, a special general, a finite infinite.

In virtue of this universality of our freedom, it becomes possible for each of us to exist solely in and with our self, even in the midst of the world. This we do by hovering in freedom above all possibilities, by an ontological irony. It is like the teaching of the Stoics or the Skeptics or the Sophistical Relativists: we view everything in thought solely in its relation to us, as not us, and hence as all our own in this very negativity; we are superior, high-flying; all is below us, subdued by our flight above and beyond it.

Just because it can say no to all, retract itself into itself, hover above all being, the ego can thus also become the lord of the world—in a cheap and wholesale way. I am the emperor in the room of my little ego. The window looks out on the world; the world is all pictured there; my walls keep me safe. There is even a certain infinite, though finite, satisfaction in sitting upon this throne.

This universal power of egoity is necessary. You cannot give

yourself to another unless you have the power of refusing yourself. He who tells the truth without realizing that he can lie, is naive, as innocent as child or beast. He who tells the truth, overcoming the temptation to lie, is good, because he has been sophisticated by the temptation and has suffered the pain of conquering it. The ego exists, not to be thrust down, but to become mature and strong, beyond innocence first, and then beyond evil. Egoity has to be defended against threats, maintained in strength, made athletic. By the nature of man it grows into a power that needs and demands its preservation. Some religions, like Tibetan Buddhism, practice the overcoming of egohood, selfhood, as an illusion that keeps us embroiled in the realm of suffering, sickness, and death, of evil undergone as well as done. But the practice does not result in a mere erasure of selfhood; it leads rather to an *Aufhebung*, a destruction which is at once a preservation and exaltation, a transfiguring which raises selfhood to a new height of power and truth—easily recognizable in the religious practitioner himself, who manifests his new-found powers over the world as well as over his self!

It is in this very element of the strength of the good, the power of the self to give or refuse itself, that the power of evil roots. The power to give and accept must also be the power to refuse and reject. It is the same power, not two different powers; it is an identity of opposite modes of action. The power by which I tell the truth or by which I recognize the right of a black man to full participation in the social world is the identical power by which I lie or refuse the recognition of his right. And this power cannot be a mere static possibility, not even a dynamic potentiality; it has to be the nature of free impulse, something genuinely daemonic. I have to resist the lie or the human refusal.

How is it that I do not resist?

I must not put myself off, or try to salve my conscience, by softening the answer. I could say: although I know in a certain way the fundamental truth and dignity of the good, the meaning of life as a full member of the moral community, nevertheless I do not fully *realize* this knowledge. It is not present and urgent to me as is the knowledge of the satisfaction vanity gives me. That would be to say that my error is due to a certain degree of ignorance, and it would tend to excuse me, if only a little. It would make the evil something slightly less than evil. And that is not enough for an answer.

Nor can the quality of evil be obscured by pleading the power

of temptation or weakness of will, rather than weakness of intelligence. For here too the evil would be lessened, made not quite evil, and our real question passed over.

The ego is its own temptation: the power of giving is the temptation to refuse. The will negates itself. Freedom contradicts its own self. Ownness turns against itself. At the point of doing evil, the power of giving becomes fascinated by itself as the power of refusing. The power of respecting becomes fascinated by itself as the power of contemning. Affirmation becomes fascinated by itself as negation. I give—a refusal; I affirm—a negative; I turn my respect around to its other side. The fascination is active, not passive. Freedom fascinates itself, intentionally, willingly.

There is not, as Paul thought, an exterior force that comes in here to make me its captive. I capture myself, make myself slave, so that I may become master of all.

Is this irrational? Of course it is, if reason is the power of finding in my relationship with other a reciprocal ownness! Does reason bid me to avoid evil? Of course it does, since it opens to my view the truth of the reciprocity of ownness in moral community. Do I listen to reason? Of course I do—I hear her every word and call! Do I commit the evil deed? . . . It is I myself, full of rationality, comprehending to the full the substance of moral truth, hearing with clarity the call of reason's voice, this I, the very model of freedom, affirmation, and truth, who fascinate myself into the practice of my little absolute vanity, who let myself play the role of the hovering lord of the world.

And do not trace it to the animal in me, to some ancient aggressiveness which I have inherited from the animal kingdom along with the rest of my flesh. The animal is not vain. I *use* aggressiveness in my vanity. I am no mere animal, but I, ego, self, the power of freedom and bondage, of affirmation and negation, of giving and refusing. Aggression I can handle, hostility I can turn to good, just because it is I who am presently in action.

To be sure, the source of the possibility of my being evil is my finiteness. If I were not an I, alongside a you, open then to the possibilities of giving and refusing, offering reciprocal ownness or taking a onesided possession, there would be no possibility of evil. A single being, all in all, like a Spinozistic substance, could not be evil.

But this is not an explanation of evil; it does not explain how I perform the evil act. It gives only a necessary condition of the

23

possibility of evil—namely, that there should be the split between one and another, so that there should be the possibility of the refusal of a reciprocal ownness.

Evil is not to be explained so much as it is to be recognized. The ego is the identical power of good and evil, as a power equally good and equally evil, since the equality here is a sameness.

We can cover up the practice of evil, explicitly by hypocrisy, less explicitly by the convenience of a bad faith. These acts are themselves evil and, indeed, part of the business of practicing evil, since it would become too uncomfortable for us to recognize ourselves without our dress in the pure nakedness of our vanity.

There is no need to offer advice or to preach.

Notes

1. These remarks on Paul should be taken in their limited sphere. I recognize that there are other passages in Romans in which Paul assigns the responsibility for evil to the self, not merely to an invading power of sin. For instance: "Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them." Nevertheless the passage cited above is clear in its own construction; the image it paints is not that of an evil man but of a man beset by the enemy.

2. Reference to any of the standard etymological dictionaries will provide a fuller and more particularized account of this context of meaning. See, for instance, Eric Partridge, Origins, *A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, New York: Macmillan, 1959 (2nd edition), articles "free," "liberal," and similarly dictionaries for other Indoeuropean languages, all of which are important in this context because these were the peoples—Greeks, Romans, Europeans—whose historical experience has been one long-continued struggle towards freedom. I have not investigated the question in non-European languages.

3. You will recognize the closeness of this description of levels of ownness to the structure of the Hegelian philosophy of mind. That is because, more than any other thinker, Hegel recognized the significance of the ownness-relationship (in terms of his own concepts of identity, unity, reconciliation, etc.) as the basic form belonging to life and spirit and did what no one else was capable of doing, showed how the same fundamental idea had to take these varied forms in order to develop its own content. There is much truth that we have to wrest from Hegel's vision, even if we should radically transform it (as has happened in Marx, Sartre, Heidegger, Dewey, and others), if we are to try to think in a manner appropriate to our own world.

The E. H. Lindley Memorial Lectureship Fund was established in 1941 in memory of Ernest H. Lindley, Chancellor of the University of Kansas from 1920 to 1939. In February 1941 Mr. Roy Roberts, the chairman of the committee in charge, suggested in the *Graduate Magazine* that

the Chancellor should invite to the University for a lecture or a series of lectures, some outstanding national or world figure to speak on "Values of Living"—just as the late Chancellor proposed to do in his courses "The Human Situation" and "Plan for Living."

In the following June Mr. Roberts circulated a letter on behalf of the Committee, proposing in somewhat broader terms that

The income from this fund should be spent in a quest of social betterment by bringing to the University each year outstanding world leaders for a lecture or series of lectures, yet with a design so broad in its outline that in the years to come, if it is deemed wise, this living memorial could take some more desirable form.

The fund was allowed to accumulate until 1954, when Professor Richard McKeon lectured on "Human Rights and International Relations." The next lecture was given in 1959 by Professor Everett C. Hughes, and has been published by the University of Kansas School of Law as part of his book *Students' Culture and Perspectives: Lectures on Medical and General Education.* The selection of lecturers for the Lindley series has since been delegated to the Department of Philosophy. The following lectures have been published, and may be obtained from the Department at a price of seventy-five cents each.

1961. "The Idea of Man—An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology."
By José Ferrater Mora, Professor of Philosophy, Bryn Mawr College.
1962. "Changes in Events and Changes in Things."
By A. N. Prior, Professor of Philosophy, University of Manchester.
1963. "Moral Philosophy and the Analysis of Language."
By Richard B. Brandt, Professor of Philosophy, Swarthmore College.
1964. "Human Freedom and the Self."
By Roderick M. Chisholm, Professor of Philosophy, Brown University.
1965. "Freedom of Mind."
By Stuart Hampshire, Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University.
1966. "Some Beliefs about Justice."
By William K. Frankena, Professor of Philosophy, University of Michigan.
1967. "Form and Content in Ethical Theory."
By Wilfrid Sellars, Professor of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh.
1968. "The Systematic Unity of Value."
By J. N. Findlay, Clark Professor of Philosophy, Yale University.
1969. "Buber and Buberism—A Critical Evaluation."
By Paul Edwards, Professor of Philosophy, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.
1971. "What Actually Happened."
By P. H. Nowell-Smith, Professor of Philosophy, York University.
1972. "Moral Rationality."
By Alan Gewirth, Professor of Philosophy, University of Chicago.