

Parte II - Razão Prática: Practical Reason

Muitos tons de mal

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MUITOS TONS DE MAL

Maria de Lourdes Borges

Neste trabalho, eu gostaria de analisar o conceito de mal em Kant. Vou investigar a diferença entre o mal radical e o mal diabólico. Inicio pela análise dos três estágios do mal: fraqueza, impureza e malignidade. Mostrarei que essas formas estão baseadas no amor de si e não numa vontade que quer o mal por si mesmo. Vou comparar essas formas com o mal diabólico, na qual o agente deseja o mal por si. Ao final vou examinar a crítica de impotência do mal em Kant, para dar conta de fenômenos de crueldade e genocídio.

MANY SHADES OF EVIL

In this paper, I would like to analyze the concept of evil in Kant. I shall investigate the difference between radical evil and diabolic evil. I begin by analyzing the three stages of evil: frailty, impurity and malignity. I will show that these forms are based on the agent self-love, instead of on a will that wants evil by itself. I will compare these forms of evil with the diabolical one, in which the agent wants evil because it is evil. At the end, I will examine the criticism of impotence of Kant's concept of evil to explain cruelty and genocide.

EVIL AND PASSION

In the *Religion*, Kant maintains that inclinations are good and that evil is due to a propensity to deviate from moral law: "The human being is evil" cannot mean anything else than that he is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it. (Rel, AA 6:32).

In the *Anthropology*, it is shown that both affects and passions may impede the will, either as a stormy feeling, an affect that hinders the accomplishment of the action based on a moral maxim, or as a passion that leads to the choice of the maxim against moral law. Both in the *Religion* and in the *Anthropology*, Kant claims that the worst evil resides in a propensity to deviate occasionally from the moral law, not in a natural predisposition. The evil principle should not be searched in man's raw nature, but in its rational perversion.

The extirpation of inclinations is not Kant's necessary purpose and he even claims in that extirpation of inclinations would "not only be futile but harmful and blameworthy as well." (Rel, AA 6: 58). However, it is an invariable position that we should extirpate passions, since they are not natural feelings or inclinations. That the evil of passions are worse than the evil of affects can be attested by many passages in the *Religion*. Kant even cites the bible - "we have to wrestle not against flesh and blood (the natural inclinations) but against principalities and powers, against evil spirits" (Rel, AA 6:60) - in order to asseverate that evil does not reside in sensible incentives. Affects can be the cause of weakness, but passions are the cause of true evil.

In his analysis of emotions and evil in Kant, Michael Rolf correctly argues that, for Kant, "all passions are evil, and that all passions are social in content", but Kant "does not claim, and in fact he explicitly denies, that affects are evil, at least in the sense that passions are evil".(ROHLF, 2013, p. 755). He considers that "affects, in contrast with passions, are not evil in the way passions are because they lack what makes passions evil, namely, a maxim opposed to the moral law".(ROHLF, 2013, p. 759).

EVIL AND SOCIETY

In order to win the battle against this principle of evil, one should find its cause. If men search the circumstances that lead them to evil principles, they will find out that they are not related to their raw nature, but to the corruption of the will that one man produce over the others. If a man consider himself poor, he does so "only to the extent that he is anxious that the other human beings will consider him poor and will despise him for it." (Rel, AA 6: 94).

In their works about evil, both Allen Wood (2010) and Sharon Anderson-Gold (2001) call the attention for the fact that evil in Kant has it is

source in our social condition. Since evil is originated from social relations, fighting against the evil of passions implies an effort to build a new society that could counteract passions.

In the chapter “Radical evil” of the book *Political Emotions*, Martha Nussbaum also stresses the social feature of human evil in Kant. She says, “the fact that we are animals is not the primary source of our moral difficulty” and Kant’s “key contention is plausible: the tempter, the invisible enemy inside, is something peculiarly human, a propensity to competitive self-love, which manifests itself whenever human beings are in a group”. (NUSSBAUM, 2013, p. 166).

The raw nature of men, although can produce strong inclinations that are difficult to master, does not lead to corruption of the human heart. Kant is unequivocal in asserting that only association of men is able to produce pure evil:

Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these, assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding, as soon as he is among human beings. Nor it is necessary to assume that these are sunk into evil and are examples that lead him astray: it suffices that they are there, that they surround him, and that they will mutually corrupt each other’s moral disposition and make one another evil. (Rel, AA 6: 94).

This claim is unambiguous: the inclinations are not by themselves the source of evil, nor are our affects. The passions of envy, addiction to power and avarice are awakened by the interaction with other human beings, even if there were nothing as a bad behavior from others. Human beings are not evil because the already wicked persons corrupt them. The ordinary social interaction make human beings evil, because this interaction awakes the comparison between people. Kant also claims that comparison is the source of this social evil: men feel that they are poor because they compare themselves to others, and the fear to be despised or dominated produces the evil passions of ambition and greed.

Nussbaum agrees with this very pessimistic Kantian viewpoint: “even when people are well fed and housed, and even when they are reasonably secure with respect to other prerequisites of well-being, they still behave badly to one another and violate one’s other rights.” (NUSSBAUM, 2013, p.167). Evil is neither

a matter of social teaching: “Kant is surely right when he suggests that people require no special social teaching in order to behave badly, and indeed regularly do so despite the best social teaching.” (NUSSBAUM, 2013, p. 167).

RADICAL EVIL AND DIABOLICAL EVIL

Although Kant maintains that evil can have the appearance of reason, it denies that there is an evil reason. The radical evil implies the possibility to choose maxims contrary to the law, but such maxims must be viewed as an accidental inversion between morality and self-love.

Kant claims that depravity, the third grade of the propensity to evil, is the “propensity of the power of choice to maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones).” (Rel, AA 6:30). This is **radical evil**; however, this is not the same to aver the existence of an evil reason. If sensibility contains too little to provide the motive of an evil reason, an absolute evil would contain too much, “because resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to incentive (for without any incentive the power of choice cannot be determined), and so the subject would be made a diabolical being.” (Rel, AA 6:35). For Kant, it is then impossible to conceive a diabolical being who wants evil for the sake of evil, and he denies the existence of **diabolical evil**.

CRUELTY AND HUMILIATION

In the book *Political Emotions*, Martha Nussbaum charges Kant for having an insufficient taxonomy of evil. For her, he ignores many aspects and feelings of human nature that will lead to evil actions. She argues that evil in Kant are not enough to explain all shades of evil, and that he does not consider cruelty or humiliation in human behavior. One should analyze the capacity of the concept of evil to explain darker shades of evil.

There are some darker shades of evil that Kant did not explore, or he thought were not possible. One of the most chocking shades of evil is revealed in mistreat of powerless people, such as children or, in some cultures, women. Gordon Michelson (1990) begins his book *Fallen Freedom* commenting a passage for Brothers Karamazov in that a child is tortured by their own parents. He also cites the example of a mother who was in prison because she prostitutes her

own six years old daughter. What was shocked in the already monstrous act was that the mother was supposed to hold the head of the child while she was being raped. We can add to these examples extreme cruelty in torture, the denial of humanity in concentrations camp. We may also mention the atrocity of 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in Paris.

These extreme figures of evil seem to escape Kant's taxonomy, because there is no self-interest who was being pursuit over moral law. These acts give us of the evil by itself. Could all these evil actions belong to what Kant called diabolical evil, to want evil by itself? Alternatively, are they merely a superlative example of where can lead the propensity to deviate from the moral law?

Kant also seems not to recognize a pleasure in evil. In this sense, Nussbaum is right when she refers to humiliation and cruelty, since Kant could accept evil as a way to obtain an object of self-esteem, but not as an end in itself. However, how does Kant explain cruelty? Does he think that it is related to diabolical evil, or is only a manifestation of malignity?

GENOCIDE

Could the Kantian concept of evil reasonably explain contemporary political phenomena such as genocide and terrorism? Alternatively, are these phenomena better explained by the concept of diabolical evil?

Surprisingly, one of the main philosophers who studied totalitarianism, Hanna Arendt, replaced the concept of radical evil, not by that of diabolical evil, but rather by the expression "the banality of evil". In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she says referring to Eichmann that "it was sheer thoughtlessness that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period [...] one cannot extract any diabolic or demonic profundity from Eichmann." (ARENDR, 1977a, p. 287-288).

In an Introduction of a later book, *The life of the mind*, Arendt explains her phrase "banality of evil": "I was struck by a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the uncontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motive. The deeds were monstrous, but the doer [...] was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous."(ARENDR, 1977b, p. 3-5).

While she was looking for a demoniac evil, she found ordinary evil man, who are insensible to the suffering of others.

Sharon Anderson Gold understands genocide as a form of radical evil in Kant's sense and not as a form of diabolical evil. If one considers that, an ethnic group, such as Jews or Bosnians, is being murdered as a way to maintain the power of another group, then genocide is related to malignity. It is a form to put the aims of self-love prior to the demands of morality.

Claudia Card, on the other hand, agrees with Martha Nussbaum that Kant's radical evil is impotent to give us a correct account of darker shades of evil. She claims that Kant does not consider the level of harm of the different forms of wrongdoing and cannot distinguish between trivial wrongs and atrocities, such as genocide or torture.

Like so many philosophers, he did not distinguish evils from lesser wrongs. It is not that he takes evil simply to mean wrong (contrarily to duty). For Kant, evil (like morally good) includes the incentives as well as the material maxim... That analysis recognizes some deeds (such as those done from weakness) as evil to a lesser degree (a lesser grade). But it offers no way to distinguish atrocities (torture or mass murder, for example) from trivial culpable wrongs (such as petty theft or trivial lies). (CARD, 2010a, p. 80).

In her last book, *Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide*, Card approximates what she calls atrocities to diabolical evil, and gives a new formulation and actuality to the Kantian concept.

To borrow the language of the 1984 UN Convention against torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Burgers and Danelius 1988 p. 177-190), diabolical evils are especially cruel, inhuman, or degrading. If we combine that idea with the interpretation of "evil or the evil's sake" as "doing one evil as a means to another", the result is a conception of diabolical evil as extremely cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment as means to an evil end. (CARD, 2010b).

Although evils are inexcusable, the agent's reason do not have to be grounded in the interest to promote an evil end. In the diabolical evils, the agent's reason are grounded in this kind of interest.

EXPLAINING EVIL

Many philosophers criticize Kant because of his incapacity to explain why people perform evil actions. When we are faced to the darker shades of evil, we ask ourselves a lot of questions that seem to remain without answer. When we face examples of cruelty, or torture, or genocide, we ask ourselves: Are these people evil? Are they sick people? Moreover, the most important question: Why have they done that? And Kant could only answer: because we have an innate propensity to do evil, to intentionally violate the moral law.

In a line shared by others, Richard Berstein in the book *Radical evil* claim that radical evil does not have any explanatory force. To say that we have a propensity to do what is morally wrong does not explain anything:

We do not always follow the moral law *because*, as human beings, we have an innate propensity to evil. Our wills are corrupted at their root. But does this really explain anything? Does it do any conceptual work? I do not think so. When stripped down to its bare essentials, it simply reiterates the fact that human beings who are conscious of the moral law sometimes (freely) deviate from it. (BERSTEIN, 2002, p. 37).

According to Berstein, the Kantian theory of radical evil does not explain anything and leave us with the same perplexity: why have they done that? "In short, radical evil – the alleged propensity to moral evil which is a universal characteristic of human- does not have any explanatory force (practical or theoretical) at all." (BERSTEIN, 2002, p. 37).

Robert Louden disagrees with Berstein, seeing a strength where Berstein sees the weakness of Kant's philosophy:

Kant's position regarding the ultimate inscrutability of human motives is a strength rather than a weakness in his doctrine of radical evil. Human action often does have an indecipherable character. Particularly in cases where people have committed horrendous acts of moral evil, we are often simply at loss to explain definitively why they did what they did. Even the most ordinary people are capable of the most horrendous deeds, and it is to Kant's credit that he recognizes this disturbing fact of human life. (LOUDEN, 2011, p. 110).

Louden goes back to Augustine, claiming that we cannot find an efficient cause for the wrong choice. It is like trying to see darkness.

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