The notion of evil is not undisputed in contemporary philosophy and theology. The reasons for this vary from aversion to the use of a vague, comprehensive term like evil to hesitation at the suggestion of an uncontrollable, non-human power of force that seems to cling to the idea of evil. On the other hand, in popular discourse speaking of evil prevails — one almost keeps stumbling over allusions to it. However, such language often seems to be incidental and not a natural part of a whole way of thinking. Thus the present situation demands a regauging of the notion of evil. *Reconsidering Evil* attempts this regauging by comparing the nature and status of the theme of evil in four different approaches. Paul Ricœur’s approach via symbols and myths of evil provides a focus that enables an analysis and comparison of the highly reflective views of Immanuel Kant, Karl Jaspers and Karl Barth — who represent an ethical, tragic and a non-theodician theological view respectively. This book sets out to determine whether one can claim that speaking of evil is most at home in a specific way of thinking. In the final chapter the notion of “the end of evil” turns out to be very important for understanding the specific character of a religious view of evil. In comparison with Kant’s ethical view and Jaspers’ tragic one, the broadest or richest understanding of evil is to be found in a religious context. However, the comparison of the different approaches also shows the possible dangers of this religious view. Thus, by means of an in-depth analysis and comparison of these thinkers, the relevance of the theme of evil for present day philosophy of religion is critically examined.
RECONSIDERING EVIL
RECONSIDERING EVIL

Confronting Reflections with Confessions

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Besides, monsters, untimely births, fruits blasted in the blossom, rains falling in desert places, miseries incident to human life, are so many arguments that the whole frame of nature is not immediately actuated and superintended by a Spirit of infinite wisdom and goodness. But the answer to this objection is ... that the aforesaid methods of nature are absolutely necessary, in order to working by the most simple and general rules, and after a steady and consistent manner; which argues both the wisdom and goodness of God. ...

We should further consider, that the very blemishes and defects of nature are not without their use, in that they make an agreeable sort of variety, and augment the beauty of the rest of the creation, as shades in a picture serve to set off the brighter and more enlightened parts.¹

These passages from Berkeley's Principles were the first theodicy that I encountered in a primary philosophical text during my study of theology.² My fellow students and I read it in a first-year course in which we could, for the first time, read "live" what we had, up to that point, only seen in secondary, introductory literature. And here I read "live" what had seemed to me to be an artificial, academic argumentation that I had thought was characteristic of secondary, non-original, introductory literature. Was this a truly philosophical way to deal with the problems aroused by suffering, disaster and misery? I imagined a beautiful picture with shadows and brighter parts and tried to link this to suffering. The argument appeared to me to be way off. This was no answer to the cries of the suffering. The reinterpretation of evil as a necessary contribution to the beautiful overall picture seemed cruel. Still, my interest in systematic reflection on the theme of evil was aroused. But it was a negative interest. And although I later had a better understanding of the intentions and possible justification of attempts at theodicy, I still feel a certain uneasiness. At least, the theme of evil

² The term "theodicy" refers to the problem that evil seems to undermine belief in a good and omnipotent God. See also pp. 9-11 below.
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— which I think is one of the most relevant philosophical and theological problems — is not exhausted by this approach. Are there other ways of dealing with it?

The following quotation was displayed on my notice board during the years I worked on this study:

In other words, we cannot drop the noun “evil” from our experience. In order to understand who we are after our lives have been wrenched apart by a human act or after we have ruined someone else’s, we must — whether we want to or not — give a name to this cause. As if it is someone with whom we stand in a certain relationship. Evil: that is what people are inclined to.3

Otten draws this conclusion after reading the impressive stories found in interviews done by Van der Ven with people who have experienced evil, either as victim or as offender. And he formulates it in reaction to those who argue in favour of dropping the notion of evil because it is dangerous and does not clarify anything.4 My attention was attracted by this passage not primarily because this interpretation of evil appeared to be entirely correct but because of the approach to the theme of evil that it expressed. This way of reflecting on the theme of evil appealed to me and seemed to be an alternative to theodicy approaches like that found in Berkeley. It did not seem to aim primarily at solving the problem of evil. Rather, it seemed to be motivated by questions like: Why do people use the term “evil”? What does this notion mean? What would be lost if we dropped it from our reflections? These are also the questions that lie behind this study. In this introduction I want to describe more precisely these questions and the considerations from which they arise. Furthermore, I will explain the way I will deal with these questions.

3 “Met andere woorden: we kunnen het zelfstandig naamwoord ‘kwaad’ niet uit onze ervaring schrappen. Om te begrijpen wie we zijn nadat ons leven door een mensendaad uit zijn voegen is geraakt of nadat wij het leven van een ander hebben verziekt, moeten we, of we willen of niet, de oorzaak een naam geven. Alsof het iemand is tot wie we in een betrekking staan. Het kwaad, dat is waartoe mensen geneigd zijn” (Willem Jan Otten, “Het raadsel van het verklaarbare kwaad,” in: Colet van der Ven, Het kwaad. Visies en verhalen (Breda: De Geus 1999, 7-18) 16).

4 The strongest representative of this view in Van der Ven’s book is the psychiatrist/psychoanalyst Andries van Dantzig (Het kwaad, op. cit., 30-38). He argues that people use the term “evil” primarily to blame someone else for something and to justify themselves. Moreover, the use of the term “evil” is, in his view, related to belief in free will. Science has revealed this belief to be a false view of human willing and acting. Like the term “evil,” the idea of free will confuses the discussion. There is no evil or freedom in any absolute sense; we can speak only of our personal view of what is good and bad.
1.1. The Dismantling of Evil

This study investigates the nature and status of the notion of evil. That means that this notion cannot be neatly defined at the beginning of this project — its meaning can emerge only in the course of this book. However, we need some focus, a working definition to indicate the subject for which we are searching. When I use the term “evil,” I understand it first of all in its substantive use. I will use the term “evil” in a very broad way: it may refer both to bad things that people do and to bad things from which people suffer. It may denote awful random events like sickness or the death of a loved one, or structural injustice and poverty. It may indicate inevitable natural disasters as well as misery that could have been prevented. It may refer to both suffering and sin. One could go on with this enumeration. But enumerating all these negative experiences does not disclose the entire meaning of the notion. The point is that the use of the term “evil” suggests that there is some relation between all these different phenomena. It suggests that they belong to a semantic field that is not covered by cognate terms such as, for example, “negative,” or “bad.” The question is what kind of connection does the term “evil” indicate between these phenomena in comparison to that of “negativity” or “badness.” Why can people speak about sickness, death, guilt or injustice as evil, instead of bad, wrong, etc.? That is precisely what will be examined in this investigation. Thus the term “evil” is supposed to indicate a specific semantic field that covers a variety of negative experiences and notions. We may already give some hints regarding the specific meaning of this field. First, the intensity of the phenomena

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7 I use the term “phenomena” to indicate both objects and events in visible reality — e.g. sickness, death etc. — and ideas, like e.g. sin or guilt.
INTRODUCTION

seems important: people speak of “evil” when they undergo terrible negative experiences. Secondly the notion of “evil” seems to occur in particular when one cannot easily make sense of these negative experiences. Thirdly, these intense and inexplicable negative phenomena are seen as undermining one’s sense of a meaningful whole. They conflict with what one regards as valuable and meaningful. Nevertheless, these phenomena seem persistent in, or even ineradicable from, human life. Thus, they give rise to comprehensive questions that challenge people’s thinking about themselves and the world.8

For the moment, we will leave it at this provisional indication of our theme. It is clear from this limited preview — especially from the third characteristic I mentioned — that the use of the term “evil” is embedded in a specific view of the world, of what is meaningful or valuable. The present investigation will introduce ways of thinking in which the notion of evil is at home.9 This formulation already reveals that “evil” is not some universal category that all people use in their interpretation of the world. It is part of a specific culture or cultures and ways of thinking. As will become clear from the choice of authors that will be investigated, this study does not aim to be cross-cultural: it will stay within the boundaries of Western philosophy and theology that are shaped by the Christian tradition.

Perhaps the way Paul Ricœur begins his investigation into symbols and myths of evil is in fact very appropriate for dealing with the theme of evil.10 He does not start with some working definition — he simply begins. On the basis of an intuition of that to which the theme of evil refers — an intuition that he must assume he shares with his readers — he starts analysing different texts that fit this intuition.11 These are not just texts in which the term “evil” is mentioned explicitly but mostly texts dealing with phenomena that may be related to it. This relation is again

8 I take the term “challenge” from the article by Ricœur indicated above. I will return to this idea below, at the end of Chapter 2, p. 90.
9 During this investigation I will use this expression “at home” often. When I say that the notion of evil is “at home” in a specific way of thinking I mean, figuratively, that it belongs to the natural, proper language of this way of thinking and occupies a natural, self-evident place in it. Presupposed in this formulation is that there are also contexts in which one does not find the notion, or in which it is a foreign element. I will also use this expression in a comparative sense, i.e. more/ most at home.
10 I mean his book La symbolique du mal (Paris: Aubier 1960), translated by Emerson Buchanan as The Symbolism of Evil (Boston: Beacon Press 1969). This book will play an important role in this study as will become clear in Chapter 2.
11 I go into this and also into the problematic side of it in Chapter 2, pp. 33-35.
a matter of intuition. I think that a certain intuition of what is meant by the notion of evil may be assumed among readers of this book as well. In the course of this book this intuition will be adjusted, complemented, confirmed or deepened. For that purpose I will deal not only with texts that explicitly go into the theme of evil but also with texts in which the term “evil” itself is not present. This is not just necessary as a negative test, i.e. to understand why it is not used here. It is also needed to understand the different phenomena as such that may be connected by the term “evil.” The question of what the meaning and value of this connection is can be subsequently discussed.

So far the delineation of the theme of evil as a broad category comprising different negative things may seem obvious. However, it is important to understand that this starting point is already very revealing as regards the character and aims of this investigation. It shows that I regard it as potentially worthwhile to view these different negative phenomena as connected with each other. It shows that I think it is potentially meaningful to have at one’s disposal a term that sees these phenomena collectively as fundamentally scandalous, as not in line with how things should be. This starting point is not obvious. Rather, it goes against a tendency that seems very strong nowadays, i.e. the tendency to separate the notion of evil into individual evil things. This is what I call the dismantling of evil. As a result of this tendency, the notion of evil as a noun becomes superfluous; there is no need to see the separate evil things as being connected together in something that goes by the name “evil.” Or, what is more, the use of the term “evil” in this way, as connecting certain phenomena together, is strongly resisted. One may observe different motives for this dismantling, whether it is consciously intended or not.

First, there are naturalistic and pragmatic motives for this dismantling. They arise from a way of thinking that emphasises that human beings should not regard themselves as the centre of the universe. The world should not be seen as created for human beings, for their pleasure or as corresponding with their ideas concerning meaning and value. Unpleasant things should not be regarded as wrong in an absolute sense, as conflicting with something like the goodness of the world, as the term “evil” suggests. It makes no sense to call the world good: the world simply is, as a neutral fact. Sickness, death, natural disasters etc. are part of our world. Insofar as we do not consider them desirable we should try to prevent them if possible and learn to live with them if not. The same is true of problems like crime, aggression, violence, injustice, poverty and oppression. If we decide that these things are not desirable we should do
something about them. This means that we should gain more knowledge about these problems. Sickness is studied especially in medical science, crime in jurisprudence, psychology and sociology, natural disasters in the natural sciences, poverty in economics, etc. In this way we specialise our knowledge in order to understand the problems better and to be able to solve them or prevent them. It is to this concrete problem-solving that we should devote our efforts and not to abstract debates on evil. Evil is a false notion that, moreover, offers no help. What helps is assessing the separate problems in detail and improving our skills in preventing or solving them.

Other motives for rejecting the notion of evil in its broad meaning may be called moral. They concern the danger that speaking of evil is speaking in absolute moral categories. This does not only go against the fact of cultural diversity with respect to morals. It is also dangerous because it claims that we are able to tell what is truly wrong, that we can view life and the world from some absolute perspective. This may easily lead to maligning or even demonising specific behaviour or specific groups of people. The other side of this is that our own ways of thinking and behaviour are justified, especially in taking measures against this evil. In order to avoid this both “other-decrying” and self-justifying way of thinking, we should not speak in terms of absolute evil. As regards the use of the term “evil” as an adjective, this is possible. But one must clearly describe what one means by it, e.g. that it is not desirable, that it is harmful etc. for certain reasons. This clarification may make the term “evil” itself superfluous.

Another objection is that the suggestion of an uncontrollable, non-human power or force clings to the substantive use of the term “evil.” It suggests that there is some permanent, mysterious counterforce at work that undermines our existence or our striving for the good. This force may easily be personified, for example, in the figure of the devil or an evil spirit. However, this way of thinking about the world as ruled by mysterious forces is characteristic of a mythical worldview that we have left behind. What was previously externalised in powers outside us is now internalised, explained as a human inclination or as a human way of perceiving things that does not correspond to a reality. This kind of objection is not just found in secular philosophical approaches but also within religious or theological ways of thinking. Both in philosophy and in theology one may observe an aversion to or a lack of interest in the theme of evil. Thinkers prefer to deal with themes like suffering or, more precisely, innocent suffering, finiteness, sin, guilt, problems related to freedom,
injustice etc. instead of the comprehensive theme of evil. Moreover, one observes, especially in so-called postmodern thinking, a tendency to emphasise the inscrutable character of evil phenomena and the inability to do justice to it in reflection. Reflection on evil, in particular by those who have not undergone it, is regarded as being a betrayal of the victims involved. It is better to be silent in the presence of evil.

A final aversion to speaking of evil is related to the use of the term to indicate something fundamentally wrong in human beings. Human beings have been enslaved and kept in their place long enough by characterisations like “evil by nature,” which are associated with religion in particular. We should liberate ourselves from this gloomy view and regard others and ourselves as people with gifts, who can occupy the place they are given as human beings. People are limited by the situations in which they grow up. But to assume that there is some fundamental evil in human beings is too pessimistic and does not do justice to the many good things we experience. There are good things and bad things, but to speak of evil in a substantive sense is to emphasise the bad things. It may lead to a passive attitude towards bad things in the world and ourselves.

Thus, there is a strong tendency, especially among scholars, to object to the vague and imprecise, comprehensive notion of evil and to dismantle it into separate concrete problems that can be studied and perhaps solved by specific disciplines. However, at the same time one may observe a tendency in the opposite direction. In politics, in the media, and especially in popular discourse speaking of evil prevails; one almost keeps falling over it. We find it in response to extreme violent events. Bush’s speaking of the “axis of evil” in response to the 9-11 attacks is, of course, the most well-known. But the term is used not only in reference to human acts: one also finds it in reference to instances of natural violence such as the tsunami of Christmas 2004. Respected newspapers regularly publish articles under the heading “evil” and the term often figures in reflective articles in magazines. At this use — which is often superficial, and simply because it reads well and appeals to sensationalism — much criticism can be levelled. On the other hand, it reveals something. Apparently, there is rich soil for using this term — also at present, a time that is dominated by a problem-solving attitude. Instances of extreme human or natural violence seem to remind us of a way of speaking that we thought we left behind and had almost forgotten. However, the use of the term “evil” often seems to remain incidental and related to specific events. It does not seem to be a natural part of a whole way of thinking. It is often put into service for a specific case, as
part of a warning or a reminder. Thus we find that when the term “evil” is used it is often used in a superficial way, without the speaker or writer committing himself to a way of thinking into which this idea has been truly incorporated. Neither does this way of using the term seem to be a convincing answer to the severe criticism and arguments in favour of dismantling. This is, broadly speaking, the present state of affairs as regards speaking of evil. It is clear that our undertaking to investigate the nature and status of speaking of evil goes against these current tendencies.

1.2. Regauging the Notion of Evil

The present state of affairs as regards the language of evil seems to call for a regauging of the notion of evil. By this term “regauging” I am indicating that we must rediscover what the notion may mean, what ways of thinking it may entail, what perspectives it may open for reflection. Of course, there is not one single correct meaning. We may trace different ways of speaking of evil. Among these, there may be meanings that are richer or deeper than others. There may be contexts, ways of thinking, in which the notion of evil flourishes and others in which it becomes stunted or vanishes. Therefore, I use the term “gauging” which suggests that there is some measure: some sense of being closer to or more remote from, of detecting or missing, the richness of the notion.

The aim of such a regauging thus goes against present tendencies in thinking of evil, and takes a different course. Although the critical questions and arguments I mentioned above will stay with us, they are not the leading questions of this investigation. They would force us onto a different path — that of charge and defence. This path would start from an open question: is speaking of evil meaningful or not? It would subsequently be necessary to try to find hard evidence for or against it. At the end of the path, then, would come the verdict: being cleared of the charges (the notion of evil is meaningful) or found guilty (the notion of evil is not meaningful). The present investigation, however, is not a defence of a specific way of thinking on the basis of hard evidence. It is a leading into ways of thinking, trying to become acquainted with them, trying to discover their value. Following a good hermeneutical practice, I start from a belief in the value and meaning of the broad notion of evil. This value and meaning is what I want to clarify and understand better. For this purpose it is necessary to be critical — that is inherent in the act
of gauging — and a positive result is not at all guaranteed. Our discoveries may be disappointing. But this study is not a trial that may lead to either dropping or keeping the notion of evil.

Although the current context of dismantling and the questions it involves are a substantial reason for the present study and lends it topicality, its aim is not to analyse and clarify patterns of thought in present-day Western society. This study is not one in the philosophy of culture but one in the philosophy of religion. I will try to find answers to the questions mentioned above by analysing great examples from the history of thought that are situated on the interface between philosophy and theology — and not, for example, by analysing people’s reactions to specific instances of evil or by interviewing them. The authors whom I will discuss are Paul Ricoeur, Immanuel Kant, Karl Jaspers, and Karl Barth.12 I will explain this choice of authors below.

In philosophy of religion the dominant — almost monopolistic — approach to the theme of evil is that of theodicy.13 As may be clear from my ill-founded aversion to this approach sketched above, this study will not follow this road. In order to gain understanding of the reasons for this choice it may be clarifying to see, first of all, that this investigation shares a starting point with theodicy. Both depart from the assumption that it is meaningful to speak of evil as a notion comprising a variety of negative phenomena. And both subsequently analyse the nature and status of this notion, its meaning and its value. However, although the meaning of the notion of evil is not yet clear at the beginning of our inquiry, theodicies do give it some specific content. For theodicy, evil comprises those negative phenomena that together seem to undermine belief in a good and almighty God who has created the world. This means that theodicy’s interest in the nature and status of evil is aroused by the accusation evil seems to imply of belief in God being irrational. Its aim is to justify this belief in a good and almighty God by showing that the accusation is unfounded. To do this, it must reveal that that which may at first seem to be inconsistent with God’s goodness or omnipotence can in fact be reconciled with it. Theodicy tries to do this by developing new insights

12 Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), Karl Barth (1886-1968). I explain the choice of these authors below in section 1.3.
INTRODUCTION

Many authors point out the relation between the rise of theodicy and the critique of religion in Enlightenment. For example, Ingolf Dalferth describes the relation between the origin of the philosophical enterprise of theism and the attention for the theodicy problem (Ingolf U. Dalferth, “The Historical Roots of Theism,” in: Svend Andersen (ed.), Traditional Theism and its Modern Alternatives (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1994, 15-43) especially 36-40).

into or by redefining the idea of evil or that of God’s goodness and omnipotence, or all of the above. In this way, a new consistent overall picture is set up. From this nature of the theodicy it follows that its interest in the theme of evil is of a very specific kind: it deals with it because of its apparent contradiction to a certain classical understanding of God. It departs from a specific meaning of the notion of evil and a specific interpretation of the problem it entails. Its interest is to gain a new insight into this meaning so that the problem can be solved.

In comparison to the enterprise of theodicy, the aim of this investigation into the nature and status of evil is broader. From the outset the notion of evil has less specific content. The primary aim of this study is to become acquainted with different ways of speaking of evil, to see what they are about, to discover what they signify. It assumes that the themes and questions to which theodicy points are not the only ones possible when reflecting on the existence of evil “before God.” It searches for other themes and questions. Moreover, it assumes that the way theodicy deals with its subject is not the only one possible. The formulation of the problem as one of consistency and the subsequent aim to solve this problem is a specific way of going into the subject of evil. I want to look for different ways.

That is, of course, not without reason. Behind this looking for other approaches lies a certain discontent with the project of theodicy. I would not express this discontent now in the way I did at the time when I first became acquainted with theodicy — i.e. the way I quoted above. Still, an important problem seems to be the discrepancy between theodicy’s reflections and aims on the one hand, and thoughts and questions on what may be called the level of experience on the other. The questions of theodicy and its dealing with them in order to solve them are not necessarily those of the suffering human being, or the one who experiences evil in another way. Perhaps the defender of theodicy would admit this frankly, for example, because he or she regards theodicy as concerned with the philosophical question of the rationality of belief. But admitting this seems to be admitting that theodicy has no relevance to the one who suffers. That would not only be most peculiar but also dangerous. For although it may
be a philosophical problem, theodicy also has implications for the way we should regard experiences of evil. And it starts at least partly from questions that rise first of all at the level of experience. If it would subsequently not be relevant on this level or even exclude questions of the suffering person as irrelevant there seems to be a danger of silencing the suffering. This danger seems especially present because the aim of theodicy is to solve the problem of evil as a problem of inconsistency. Reflection on evil should induce people to relate their own experiences and thoughts to what is stated in the reflection. I think that theodicy, as I have defined it, may fail at this point. However, taking into account the question of the possible justification of the theodicy project asks for a much more elaborate discussion than I can and need to go into here. For the purpose of the present study it is only necessary to have pointed out the specific character of the theodicy enterprise and the possible relevance of a different kind of investigation into evil. The present inquiry is thus also to be seen as an account of the search for a different approach to evil within the philosophy of religion than that of theodicy.

Now that I have highlighted this link with experience or thoughts drawn from “real life,” one may be surprised at not finding many explicit references to, for example, stories about dealing with suffering in everyday life or literary expressions of people who have gone through extreme cruelty, etc. The reason that such references will not be found here is — apart from lack of adeptness in that kind of writing — that I have chosen to remain largely within the frames of expressions of the authors I investigate. These authors are very much aware of the need of a relation of their reflection to experience. But they do not express that in quoting and analysing all kinds of cases drawn from “real life.” It is not difficult to imagine those cases in relation to their reflection. But it does not seem necessary for explaining, understanding or valuing the thinking of these authors to confront them with instances from, for example, the atrocities of the twentieth century. I hope that the actual elaboration of this approach in the rest of this book will justify this choice better than it is possible to do beforehand.

The starting point for this project of regauging the notion of evil will be the hypothesis that this notion is most at home in religion. First, the use of this general term “religion” requires some explanation. I have indicated that this investigation is limited to the Western context in which Christianity is dominant. For the authors whom I will discuss Christianity is also their frame of reference when talking about religion or belief.
However, because three of the four authors belong more to the field of philosophy than to that of theology, and are not skilled in dogmatics, the more general term “religion” seems appropriate. They use it themselves and terms like “the divine,” “the sacred,” “transcendence” are in line with this language. One should keep in mind that in the thinking of our authors these terms are associated first of all with the Christian religion. The present study is not in the field of dogmatics either, so it links up with the language of these authors. I will not enter the debate on the precise Christian elements in their thinking or on the points at which they depart from mainstream Christianity. But I do discuss their religious views. However, the use of the term “religion” is of course problematic if applied to Barth’s theological thinking because of his critical use of this term as opposed to belief. Yet the correctness of an analysis of Barth does not depend on this use of the term “religion.” As will become clear in Chapter 5 and 6 I think it is possible to compare Barth’s thinking with that of other authors that do not share his principles, although this is not easy. In the context of such a comparison a term like “religion” is useful, as I hope will be shown in these chapters.

But let us return to our hypothesis that the notion of evil is most at home in religion. This thesis is, on the one hand, suggested by a certain common sense view. The notion of evil has been associated with religion from different points of view, both to reject it and defend it. The abovementioned criticism also pointed to this religious character of the notion of evil in rejecting thinking in absolute terms and in reference to mysterious powers, as well as the view of human beings as evil by nature. Moreover, when the notion of evil is used in the more popular contexts to which I referred above, one finds it in particular in arguments dealing with final questions, the destination of human beings or the world, etc. These are questions related to religion. On the other hand, the popularity of the term in these discourses argues against our hypothesis insofar as they are not at all fully religious but rather secular. Does this mean that the term “evil” is a foreign element in these not explicitly religious argumentations or is it just as possible to speak of evil outside religion? These are questions that are important in testing our hypothesis. I will therefore deal not only with religious texts but also with texts that are not religious as such. The first question is whether speaking of evil in the context of religion can be distinguished from speaking of it in other contexts. We can subsequently examine whether this religious speaking is broader or richer in meaning, so that we may say that the notion of evil is most at home here. The precise way in which these questions that have now been listed will be dealt with is explained in the next section.
1.3. The Gauges for this Project

I already indicated above that the material for this investigation will be major examples from the history of thought that are situated on the interface between philosophy and theology. I chose the approaches to the theme of evil found in Ricœur, Kant, Jaspers and Barth as the gauges for this project. For the project of regauging the notion of evil it is necessary to have examples that are representative of different ways of speaking of evil. In order to investigate whether it possible to say that speaking of evil is especially at home in religion it was necessary to differentiate these views on the basis of the extent to which religion dominates the reflection. Although religion figures in all four approaches, it is not equally prominent; they are not imbued to the same extent with religion. Kant’s reflection is first of all ethical in nature; Jaspers’ dealing with evil may be called tragic. I will explain this choice of approaches here — which is at the same time an explanation of the arrangement of the chapters because this corresponds with the order in which the authors are discussed here. In order to explain this we should first go into the choice of Ricœur. He is the key figure of this study.\(^{15}\) The choice of the other authors is based on their relation to Ricœur.

When I first read Ricœur’s early texts on evil, I recognised in them an interest in reflection on the theme of “evil before God” that takes a different road than theodicy. His approach may be characterised as a regauging of the notion of evil on the basis of great examples of symbolic expressions of evil from the sources of Western culture. In Ricœur’s view, this regauging is necessary because reflection does not have direct access to the theme of evil. Behind this view lies a distrust of reflective or speculative ways of dealing with evil. This distrust relates to the danger mentioned above of not keeping in touch with experience. Ricœur traces this problem to the ambiguous character of evil. In symbolic language this ambiguity finds a more natural mode of expression than in reflective discourse. Thus, in Ricœur’s thinking the problematic character of reflection on evil is brought to the fore. We will also find this awareness in the reflections of the other authors. They are all aware of the danger of not doing justice to the gravity of evil in reflecting on it. They warn of the danger of turning evil into something harmless, or justifying it when thinking it through and systematising it in reflection. They argue in favour

\(^{15}\) As a result of Ricœur’s central position the second chapter — in which we will deal with Ricœur — is more extensive than the other chapters.
of a reflection that reveals evil in its seriousness and scandalousness, although there are many differences in their specific elaboration of this conviction. Thus our authors help us to keep the problematic character that was discovered in the first section in view; it will be further investigated throughout the entire book.

It was Ricœur's intention to make this regauging on the basis of symbolic expressions fertile for a philosophy of evil, i.e. a fully reflective thinking. However, he did not elaborate further on this philosophy because he became occupied with other problems after he had finished his analysis of the symbols. I want to find out what the results of this analysis yield when used as keys to analyse other reflective approaches. Therefore, I will investigate the reflections by Kant and Jaspers and to a lesser extent by Barth with the help of notions and insights taken from Ricœur's analysis. In this sense as well Ricœur is the key figure of this study. However, this does not mean that his insights function as an absolute criterion for evaluating the others; the application of Ricœur's thinking in other contexts also implies a critical evaluation of this thinking itself. Moreover, the different chapters build on one another, so Ricœur's thinking is not the only point of reference in analysing the other approaches. The comparative setup of this study is not restricted to that between Ricœur and the other authors but is a comparison of all the authors with one another. Moreover, the necessary condition for this comparison is that the reflections of the different authors are studied thoroughly in themselves so that their proper character becomes clear.

I choose two important ways of dealing with the theme of evil in which religion is not prominent: Kant’s ethical approach and Jaspers’ tragic approach. By investigating these approaches the hypothesis is tested that the notion of evil is a typically religious category. What is the nature and status of the notion of evil in an ethical and in a tragic way of thinking? Examining this question also implies that we make the transition from the level of symbolic language to that of philosophical reflection. This transition raises the question of whether reflection is able to take into account insights and ways of thinking that were discovered in the symbols and myths. For the investigation of this problem the notion of ambiguity will turn out to be of central importance. In the analysis of the reflections of Kant and Jaspers Ricœur’s thinking thus serves as the main guideline, although the investigation of Jaspers’ approach also builds on the investigation of Kant. My choice of an ethical and a tragic context as material for comparison is based on the results of Ricœur's analysis of the symbolic expressions. This choice will be further explained at the end of the
second chapter. I subsequently opt for Kant and Jaspers as representatives of an ethical and tragic approach, respectively, because of their relation with Ricœur’s thinking. Both Kant and Jaspers and to a lesser extent Barth have strongly influenced Ricœur’s philosophy, especially as regards the subject of evil. The presence of Kant as the only eighteenth-century thinker may surprise some readers. However, if we are looking for a major representative of an ethical view, this choice is quite obvious. Moreover, we find Kant’s most important reflections on the theme of evil in his book on religion. For the purpose of the present investigation this is, of course, a highly relevant connection. Furthermore, both Jaspers and Barth have strong ties with Kant’s thinking. The choice of Jaspers is also surprising perhaps, because his philosophy is not as well known as that of the others. His major influence on Ricœur’s thinking was an important consideration for choosing him. Moreover, his investigations into “the tragic” — which are revealing as to his own thinking — and the existentialist character of his philosophy in general show him to be a valuable candidate for representing a tragic view of evil. And, again, his relation to Kant’s thinking is also an important aspect. Of course, other authors might have been chosen than the ones I have; I do not claim that this selection is the only correct or valuable one. I hope the actual investigation into their thinking, as well as the comparison between them, will show the value of this specific selection.

For the study of Karl Barth’s thought a different approach is followed than in the case of Kant and Jaspers. The reason for dealing with his theology is that it seems important for our comparative investigation to have a representative of a fully religious or theological approach to evil. Although religion is important in Ricœur’s analysis of symbolic expressions of evil, his approach could not serve this purpose. This is first of all because the character of his reflection is so specific: it is based on the symbols and myths. Ricœur thus functions as a counterpart over against fully reflective views like that of Kant, Jaspers and Barth. Moreover, Ricœur elaborates too little on the religious character of speaking of evil; he does not think it through systematically. This void is filled by Barth’s thinking. Another important consideration was that Barth is critical of theodicy approaches to evil and tries to find a different way of dealing with the theme. In this search he is very critical of reflection on evil in general. We deal with his approach to gain further insight into what a fully religious reflection on evil looks like. However, his reflection is so fully

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16 See Chapter 2, p. 94.
INTRODUCTION

religious that comparison with other, less religious approaches seems very
difficult. One might say that Barth regauges the problem of evil on the
basis of Scripture and tradition. But in this regauging he has a very spe-
cific starting point, i.e. that God can be known only in Christ in whom
God has revealed himself. This principle makes it difficult to compare his
thinking with those of others who do not share this principle. Therefore,
I will first deal with him separately, without taking into account Ricœur’s
notions and without comparison to Kant and Jaspers. Only after having
thus analysed his thinking on the basis of his own principles will I try to
open it up for comparison. I will do this in the final chapter of this book
and will use, for this purpose, a notion that is very important in Ricœur’s
study of the symbols and myths, i.e. that of the end of evil. This notion
refers to themes like salvation, promise, hope, return, pardon, justifica-
tion and redemption. I postpone the discussion of this notion to the final
chapter. There it will enable a final comparison of the different authors
with a view to the central questions of this book. For this comparison the
leading question will be whether this notion of the end of evil reveals a
central, distinguishing characteristic of religious thinking on evil.

Instead of dealing with the questions of this inquiry by referring to the
ideas of Ricœur, Kant, Jaspers and Barth one could also have imagined
an approach via different contemporary systematic monographies on the
theme of evil. I do not opt for this approach. What I try to do in this
book is think through different examples of philosophical and theologi-
ical reflection with a view to finding out what notions of evil they con-
tain. My aim is to understand whether it is possible to say that the notion
of evil is most at home in one of these ways of thinking, that it flourishes
in one of these contexts. This approach means that I must become
acquainted with different philosophical and theological traditions and
styles — a very time-consuming process. For this purpose I have made
a selection of works from each of the authors that seem relevant to the
theme. The choices I made in this selection are explained in the separate
chapters. In this approach there is no room for an extensive discussion of
the reception of each of these authors. Doing so would entail the danger
of discussing the different authors in too detailed a way, so that returning

17 Monographies that appeared quite recently are, to mention just a few, e.g. Susan
University Press 2002); Rüdiger Safranski, *Das Böse oder Das Drama der Freiheit* (Frank-
furt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1999?); Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil. A
to the comparative movement would be very difficult. Of course, during my research into the different authors I have consulted major interpreters and commentators. But in general the share of secondary literature in this book is small in comparison to the attention paid to the primary sources.

Let me recapitulate the aim of the present study in a few lines. It is an inquiry belonging to the discipline of the philosophy of religion. It investigates the nature and status of the notion of evil. Its main question is whether it is possible to say that speaking of evil is most at home in a specific way of thinking. The hypothesis is that this is a religious way of thinking. In order to test this hypothesis, different representative approaches to evil will be analysed. This analysis will consist in a rather detailed investigation into these approaches and in a comparison of them. Let us turn to this analysis now.
CHAPTER 2

RICŒUR’S PROJECT OF A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO EVIL VIA SYMBOLS

Paul Ricœur is an important figure in this investigation into the value of the notion of evil in reflective approaches other than theodicy. As I already indicated in the introduction, my search for approaches that keep in touch with experiences of evil as well as possible religious meanings was inspired by reading Ricœur’s early work on evil. I recognised in his way of dealing with evil a distrust of speculative approaches. He emphasises that the great classical speculations on evil — e.g., the idea of original sin — can only be understood in the light of the non-speculative expressions from which they originated. The term “speculation/speculative” is used by Ricœur as a technical term which refers to reflection as found in philosophy or theology, as distinct from more literary forms of reflection such as found in the symbols and myths of evil. In the symbolism of evil he thus distinguishes three levels of expression of evil: symbol, myth and speculation (HF 10, 11, FM xlii; SdM 168, 169, SE 4, 5; and see p. 36 and section 2.4 below).
symbolic and mythical representations of evil. These expressions are closer to what may be called the level of experience than they are to the speculative ones. By studying these symbols and myths, Ricœur tried to trace central aspects of the theme of evil. Referring to the aim of my own investigation I characterised his project of trying to find philosophical access to the theme of evil via symbols and myths as a regauging of the theme of evil. This is precisely what seems necessary in contemporary philosophical and theological reflection. Thus, my starting hypothesis in this chapter is that Ricœur’s approach is valuable for this investigation because — negatively — it is different from theodicy, critical of speculative reflection on evil, and — positively — wants to discover the different meanings of the notion of evil by taking into account both experience and religion. The investigations in this chapter will test this hypothesis. They will focus on the question of which aspects of evil Ricœur discovers as important. It will also discuss his reflections regarding the ways in which philosophical reflection should deal with evil.

This test will continue in the following chapters as well. There I will compare Ricœur’s view of evil based on symbolic expressions from the Western tradition with “fully reflective” approaches. This confrontation will contribute both to our understanding of these approaches and to that of Ricœur. In this sense the present chapter is only the first step in our investigation. Although this chapter may at first sight seem primarily to contribute to our understanding of Ricœur it will become clear in the following chapters that this investigation is a step that contributes to answers to my general questions. It throws light on the questions regarding the specific character of the theme of evil and the context in which evil may make sense. Moreover, in the final chapter of this book I will return to Ricœur’s ideas; here different aspects from the separate chapters come together in an investigation of the notion of “the end of evil.”

My analysis of Ricœur’s ideas will in the main be based on the book in which he presents his hermeneutics of the symbolic expressions of evil, i.e. *The Symbolism of Evil*. However, in order to understand the approach of this book and Ricœur’s view of evil it is necessary to take into account the works that preceded *The Symbolism of Evil*. Thus, Ricœur’s early work from the 1960s and 1970s will be the focus of my investigation, supplemented incidentally by later texts. This selection of the material for this

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3 In Ricœur’s analysis of the symbols of evil the notion of the end of evil concerns symbols of deliverance from evil, such as pardon, return, salvation and reconciliation. See also notes 149, 265 below.
study is justified because this early period is also the time in which he most extensively dealt with the theme of evil. 

2.1. Ricœur’s Early Work: Towards a Philosophy of Evil

2.1.1. Abstraction from Evil

Ricœur’s first original work, which appears after his first books on Jaspers and Marcel and a translation of Husserl’s *Ideen I*, is the three-volume *Philosophy of the Will*. The first volume, entitled *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, is concerned with the human function of the will. It approaches this theme by contrasting it with “the involuntary.” Ricœur supposes a reciprocal relationship between the involuntary and the voluntary; they cannot be understood independently, or the one as a derivative of the other. The plan for this approach to the human will included from the very beginning a discussion of the theme of evil. However, it was also clear from the outset that the *Philosophy of the Will* could not start with this discussion; the approach to this theme had to be gradual. Moreover, in the course of his work on this project it became increasingly clear to Ricœur that the discussion of evil would also require a shift in method: from phenomenology to hermeneutics. The understanding of the reasons for this gradual approach to evil as well as the shift in method is revealing with respect to Ricœur’s view of evil in general. Therefore I will take up these aspects first.

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4 My choice to focus on the contribution to the investigation of evil provided by Ricœur’s analysis of the symbolic expressions of evil means that I will leave aside, among other things, his reflections on forgiveness which appear in *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Paris: Seuil 2000).


6 The original French title *Le volontaire et l’involontaire* is translated in English as *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. “Freedom and Nature” refers to the important paradox at the level of existence that parallels the dualism between the voluntary and the involuntary at the level of the pure structures (cf. e.g. VI 22, FN 19). Although this paradox figures largely in *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, one may ask why exactly this paradox was chosen as the title of the English translation and not, for example, that of “subject and body.”

7 VI 8, FN 4, 5.
At the beginning of his *Philosophy of the Will* Ricœur announces that in the first volume he will deliberately bracket or suspend evil, i.e. make an abstraction.8 The reason for this abstraction is that he is interested in that which precedes or lies beneath evil. He calls this the domain of the fundamental structures or possibilities of the human being.9 In order to discover these structures it is necessary to abandon reality or distance oneself from it. By thus interrupting “lived experience” (*le vécu*) or being totally absorbed in one’s life it becomes possible to determine the meaning of this reality, of one’s life.10 By banning belief in the being of reality or the world it becomes possible to determine the meaning and possibility of being. This is what is meant by *epochè*, the philosophical activity of reduction which is characteristic of phenomenology.11 Ricœur characterises the method of phenomenology as descriptive rather than explanatory, which is characteristic of the natural sciences.12 The latter approach traces the complex back to the simple, such as a law. Phenomenology, on the other hand, wants to comprehend by doing nothing but “looking” intensely and renouncing any judgement on the reality of what is seen. Moreover, Ricœur sides with Husserl’s eidetic version of this phenomenological description which explicitly aims not simply to renounce belief in the general reality of phenomena but to penetrate to the idea (*eidê*) or essence of things by abstracting it from the coincidental.13

8 E.g. VI 7, FN 3.
9 “... the human being’s structures or *fundamental possibilities*” (VI 7, FN 3).
11 “Phenomenology begins when, not content to ‘live’ or ‘re-live,’ we interrupt lived experience in order to signify it. Thus the *epochè* and the meaning-intention [*visée de sens*] are closely linked” (TA 64, FTA 40).
12 VI 8, FN 4.
13 E.g. VI 7, FN 3, 4. In the later text “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics” Ricœur clearly opposes the idealistic interpretation of this search for the essences that started already with Husserl’s own philosophy, i.e. in the *Ideen* and especially the *Cartésiantsche Meditationen* (TA 43-81, FTA 25-52; cf. Ricœur’s article “Husserl,” in: *A l'école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin 1986, 7-20) 16, 17; translated by Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree as “Introduction: Husserl (1859-1938),” in: *Husserl. An Analysis of his Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1967, 3-12) 9-11). According to this interpretation, only the ideas of consciousness are real and, what is more, their existence can be known in all clarity by following intellectual intuition. For idealistic phenomenology only immanence is real, that is, that which is given in the act of knowing intuitively. Transcendences in the sense of that which exceeds knowing, the so-called *Ding an sich*, are said not to exist at all. This idealistic phenomenology is too much centred on
In order to achieve this pure description of essences, evil needs to be bracketed for, in Ricœur's view, it is not part of the essence of things. Ricœur later describes the difference between this pure description of essences on the one hand and the discussion of evil on the other in terms of directness of language. The “essential meanings and structures” were thought to be describable in direct language, i.e. the “ordinary language” of “purpose, project, motive, wanting, trying and so on.” With respect to evil, however, symbolic, indirect language is used. Insofar as Ricœur adheres to Husserl’s eidetic phenomenology, he stays within “the atmosphere of intelligibility” in which the pure structures can be laid bare. However, in *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur also goes beyond the limits of this sphere of intelligibility. A so-called “mystery” enters his reflections when the will is viewed in its relation to the body: the body is obscure, even for the phenomenological operation of looking intensely. In the long run Husserlian phenomenology does not take seriously what Ricœur indicates by the French word *existence*, i.e. my incarnated or bodily existence. In order to make room for this mystery of the body and the opaque connections between will and body Ricœur needs to go beyond strict Husserlian phenomenology. This mystery relates to the experience of contradiction or brokenness in oneself, e.g. the fact that one decides this but desires something else. This brokenness may be seen the subject in Ricœur’s opinion. In stead of this idealistic focus on the subject, Ricœur follows another important conviction of phenomenology, namely its stress on the concept of intentionality. By intentionality phenomenology denotes that all consciousness is directed to its object or in other words, all consciousness is “consciousness of.” A noetic and a noematic side are distinguished in consciousness: the “subjective” side or being aware and the “objective” side on which consciousness focuses. To analyse consciousness defined in this way means questioning its acts with respect to their implications or potentialities. It is to clarify the meaning ascribed to the object of consciousness. This clarification is necessary, because an intentional act always intends more than is actually given. To bring this “more” into light, the synthesis of actual and possible observations, is what phenomenology wants to do, according to Ricœur, by means of the intentional analysis.

15 VI 17, FN 13.
16 “This is why … the descriptive method will follow a transcending movement *[un mouvement de dépassement]* which appears ultimately alien to the native genius of Husserlian psychology” (VI 18, FN 14).
18 VI 19, FN 16.
19 Ricœur states that an active participation in “my incarnation as a mystery” is necessary; this participation means going beyond phenomenology (VI 18, FN 14).
as the discord between the so-called soul and body or between freedom and nature. Reflecting on oneself can easily result in a concentration on what is called the soul; the body or nature becomes a thing, an object at a distance. Ricœur calls this penchant for focusing on the soul a tendency to “posit itself” (auto-position), i.e. “the tendency of the ‘I’ to close a circle with itself.”

On the one hand, this dualistic tendency should be broken in order to do justice to my incarnated existence, the unity of me with my body. On the other hand, this relation between my body and myself in incarnated existence is a polemical one, according to Ricœur, which introduces a new dualism. Becoming conscious of oneself thus also implies a brokenness; the voluntary and the involuntary are not just in a reciprocal relationship but also in a conflictive one. Taking into account these difficulties and mysteries thus already means a shift in method compared to Husserl’s phenomenology which did not concern itself with these aspects. In a later article Ricœur characterises his method in Freedom and Nature as an existential phenomenology. The term “existential” then refers to the fact that the investigation into “these essential structures implied the recognition of the central problem of embodiment, of le corps propre.”

Ricœur remarks that by taking into account these difficulties and mysteries of the conflict and connection between the voluntary and the involuntary one already touches upon the sphere of evil or fault. This

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20 E.g. VI 17, 23, FN 14, 20.
21 VI 20, FN 17.
22 VI 21, FN 18.
23 Ricœur remarks that Husserl “was not concerned with focusing the human being’s empirical reality around one fundamental fact, such as the already given degradation of the will and its disguise in the shades of passion” (VI 7, FN 4).
24 Paul Ricœur, “From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language,” op. cit., 87. Don Ihde mentions Gabriel Marcel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty as examples of this existential phenomenology (Hermeneutic Phenomenology, op. cit., 3).
25 “The difficulties of reconciling freedom and nature ... implicitly raise the question of the fault which a description of the voluntary and the involuntary must abstract from consideration” (VI 23, FN 20). In Ricœur’s vocabulary the two terms “evil” (mal) and “fault” (faute) seem to be almost synonymous. In his early work, especially Freedom and Nature, he prefers the term “fault,” whereas in Fallible Man and especially in The Symbolism of Evil the term “evil” is used more often. As Don Ihde rightly indicates, the term has two meanings (Hermeneutic Phenomenology, op. cit., 20, 21). First, there is the geological one of a crack in the surface of the earth. Ihde argues that Ricœur uses this meaning as a metaphor for the human condition: the geological discontinuity becomes an image for the human “noncoincidence within himself.” Secondly, “fault” indicates someone’s responsibility for something bad, as in “It is my fault.” According to Ihde, Ricœur expands this moral usage “to cover the whole dimension of evil suffered and enacted.” Cf. also the translator’s introductions in Freedom and Nature and Fallible Man (FN xvii, FM xxxv). Perhaps
observation gives rise to the question of what precisely the reason is for his initial abstraction from fault. If Ricœur clearly intends from the beginning of his philosophy of the will to deal with fault — even coming to the threshold of the transition to fault — and wants to remain aware of empirical reality — how can his abstraction from fault be explained? Ricœur explicitly raises this question himself.26 Part of the answer seems to lie in Ricœur’s being convinced of the presence of fundamental structures prior to any fault as well as to any innocence. Both fault and innocence make use of these fundamental structures: “the fundamental possibilities” are the “common keyboard of human nature on which mythical innocence and empirical guilt play in different ways.”27 Nor are these structures or possibilities ruined by fault.28 Therefore they can be studied apart from fault. In the study of these structures fault is a foreign element; it is not a part of these structures.29 Rather, it obscures our insight into the fundamental possibilities of human beings and causes confusion. For example, Ricœur mentions slavery to the passions as an important characteristic of fault. This slavery is easily mistaken for freedom: the infinity of immoderation is mistaken for the infinity of freedom. Therefore, fault needs to be bracketed in order to make it possible to understand fundamental structures like the “authentic infinite of freedom.”30 These fundamental structures cannot be understood together with fault in one and the same reflective act. A “total recasting of method” is necessary for the approach of fault.31 By the time Ricœur announced this revision he did not yet have a completely worked-out idea of what this new method would look like.32 He characterises it simply as an empirical description in contrast with an eidetic one.33

However, Ricœur’s view of fault as not belonging to the fundamental structures of human beings is not just methodological. It also implies a
specific view of human beings and their relation to fault. It makes clear that it is not so that “the human being began with the fault.” Fault is not constitutive of human beings as such or of their freedom. It is rather the opposite: the structures which are constitutive of human beings are morally neutral and unaffected by fault. Fault is the misuse of these fundamental possibilities of human willing. Seen against this background of the fundamental structures, fault appears as a fall, as a loss. Basically, this fall lacks intelligibility, which is why Ricœur calls it “the absurd.”

Ricœur also describes the guilty will as an enslavement that happens to freedom. All these expressions — fall, loss, absurdity, enslavement — indicate a contrast between the primordial state of the fundamental structures and the situation of the fault. Ricœur argues that only by means of this contrast which is established by the pure description of the voluntary and the involuntary is fault seen in its “full negative force (pleine négativité).” It becomes clear that fault is the enslavement of the entire free will. The human being is not “part free and part guilty.” The seriousness of fault lies in its total character. It comes to light only in contrast with the fundamental structures.

But does this contrast between the fundamental structures and fault not imply that these structures are good as such, i.e. that the human being is good by nature? This question seems important for determining the precise implications of Ricœur’s idea of fundamental structures. But it is not easy to answer this question. On the one hand, Ricœur states explicitly that the fundamental structures do not present a state of innocence: “Innocence does not reside in the structures, concepts, but in the actual, total human being, just like the fault.” Ricœur does not want the description of the structures to be a description of “the lost paradise of innocence.” Again, the fundamental possibilities are still open to both innocence and fault. On the other hand, Ricœur admits that his investigation into the structures is motivated by the belief in “a self which could and should be other,” i.e. other than determined by the fault one actually
committed. This is the belief in the primordial innocence of human beings which, Ricœur argues, can be expressed only in mythical terms. Ricœur acknowledges explicitly that “the myth of innocence is the desire, the courage, and the imaginary experience which sustains eidetic description of the voluntary and the involuntary.” This remark clearly reveals that Ricœur’s interest in a pure description of human willing is inspired by a specific view of human beings and evil. He does not view evil as having a place in the ontology of human beings. This reveals a belief in a certain fundamental goodness of human beings indeed, in spite of Ricœur’s remark that the fundamental structures do not present a state of innocence. His interest in the fundamental possibilities displays hope, a “courage of the possible.” Yet, this does not mean that evil is a negligible factor. On the contrary, Ricœur emphasises, as I said, the serious character of fault; fault is the only because it affects the human being as a whole. This paradoxical combination of the serious character of evil and the hope for possibilities beyond or in spite of this evil will turn out to be very important in Ricœur’s reflection on evil.

Precisely at these characteristic points lies a controversy between Ricœur’s view and what may be called the existentialist view of evil and, in particular, of guilt. This controversy is also behind the title of the second part of the Philosophy of the Will: Finitude and Guilt. In a later article he gives a clear summary of this controversial relation to existentialist views.

41 VI 30, FN 28.
42 VI 31, FN 28.
43 VI 27, 30, FN 24, 27.
44 VI 31, FN 28. Ricœur mentions the term “hope” in relation to the myth of innocence and, with reference to Kant, the appeasement of the conflict between the voluntary and the involuntary (VI 22, 36, FN 19, 34). In later texts this notion of hope figures largely. Cf. Chapter 6, pp. 259-260, notes 72-73. Kevin J. Vanhoozer very aptly characterises Ricœur’s philosophy as stemming from “a passion for the possible” which gives rise to hope (Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990) e.g. 3-18 and passim). Ricœur uses this expression “passion for the possible” in several later articles with reference to Kierkegaard (e.g. Freedom in the Light of Hope” Cdl 398, Col 407; Guilt, Ethics and Religion” Cdl 427, Col 437; “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 206, 207).
45 T. M. van Leeuwen points out the central importance of the “affirmation originaire” for Ricœur’s philosophy. He distinguishes between two directions in this affirmation. First, affirmation is “the most primordial power” in human beings. Negative experiences thus presuppose a more fundamental affirmation, like “meaning, innocence, identity, life.” Secondly affirmation has an ontological dimension: it expresses the “goodness of our Origin, of being.” This does not mean that Ricœur is not sensitive to negative experiences, but he regards them as “indices of a more fundamental affirmation” (T.M. van Leeuwen, The Surplus of Meaning. Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1981) 33).
Nineteen sixty-one was the year that I published *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*, and at that time a specific problem occupied my mind: how is it possible to introduce within the framework of a philosophy of the will, on which I had written ten years earlier, some fundamental experiences such as guilt, bondage, alienation, or, to speak in religious terms, sin? As such, this problem could be expressed in terms of an existential philosophy. All existential philosophies of the forties and fifties had met this problem. My problem belonged to this sphere of questions with a somewhat more specific interest. My problem was to distinguish between finitude and guilt. I had the impression, or even the conviction, that these two terms tended to be identified in classical existentialism at the cost of both experiences, guilt becoming a particular case of finitude and for that reason beyond cure and forgiveness, and finitude, on the other hand, being affected by a kind of diffused sense of sadness and despair through guilt. This is why I chose *Finitude and Guilt* as a general title for the two volumes of which I spoke and the problem was that of their difference and of their connection.46

The distinction between finitude and guilt is again a distinction between a fundamental and an actual or empirical level. This also means that the level of finitude is morally neutral, according to Ricœur. The negativity of finitude is of a kind entirely different from that of guilt. Finitude is “neither unreasonable nor sad,” whereas guilt indicates the irrational, sad and absurd alienation from and confusion in this finitude.47 Ricœur’s distinction between finitude and guilt is thus very much in line with his earlier reflections on the fundamental structures and fault.

However, Ricœur’s problem is not just, as the quotation says, the distinction between finitude and guilt but also their connection. In comparison to the first part of the *Philosophy of the Will* the interest of the second part lies not in the fundamental level as such but more in the link between this level and the empirical level. The brackets are thus removed in this second part of the project; Ricœur no longer abstracts from evil.48 Yet this does not mean that he now directly addresses the reality of evil. *Fallible Man* rather carries on the prior investigation into the fundamental structures.49 But this investigation now concentrates on the question

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46 Paul Ricœur, “From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language,” op. cit., 86.
47 “Culpabilité tragique et culpabilité biblique,” in: *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 1953 XXXIII (Strasbourg: Université de Strasbourg, 285-307) 286. This article has not been translated into English.
48 “The present work intends to do away with this purely descriptive abstraction [sc. of *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*] by reintroducing what was bracketed” (HF 9, FM xlii).
49 Ricœur himself later describes this study as the elaboration of “the ontology implicit in the dialectic of the voluntary and the involuntary” (“Intellectual Autobiography,” in: Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, The Library of Living Philosophers Vol. XXII (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court 1994, 3-53) 15; the original
of whether it is possible to discover in these structures the weakness through which evil comes about. The fundamental structures are thus analysed with a view to the question of where the possibility for evil in these structures lies. This is the question of the fallibility of the human being. That attention is focused on this question shows that Ricœur is now more interested in the relation of the mysterious conflict between the voluntary and the involuntary on the one hand, and evil on the other. In *Fallible Man* he relates this duality of the voluntary and the involuntary to “a much vaster dialectic dominated by the idea of the human being’s disproportion, the polarity within him of the finite and the infinite, and his activity of intermediation or mediation.”

The notions of the disproportion and of the human being as “a being of the mean” are explicitly chosen with a view to an approach to the theme of evil. It is important to note that the fundamental level and the empirical are not connected via the notion of finitude as such. The link lies in the combination or, better, the disproportion of finitude and infinitude. This implies another criticism of existentialism: finitude should not be made the “global characteristic of human reality.” Ricœur wants “to speak of infinitude as much as of human finitude.”

How does Ricœur approach the theme of human fallibility, i.e. the possibility of fault? Although this project has much in common with his
previous phenomenological approach, Ricœur does not very often call this approach phenomenology. Instead, he uses the terms anthropology or philosophical anthropology. Ricœur also contrasts his approach with that of ethics: his study of fallibility is directed at the primordial and neutral structure and therefore is not concerned with ethics. For ethics always starts from the “the clash of good and evil”, from the situation in which the human being has already chosen evil. Ricœur wants to avoid this ethical presupposition of a fallen state. He admits that “we have access to the primordial only through what is fallen.” But Ricœur is interested in understanding this fall and not just the fallen state. He investigates the primordial situation which is presupposed by any notion of fall or loss. A good example of this method is Ricœur’s way of dealing with Kant’s threefold division of the passions into those having to do with possession (Habsucht), with domination (Herrschsucht) and with honour (Ehrsucht). Ricœur makes use of this division but only so that he can determine, behind these “passions,” the primordial quests for having, power, and worth that are constitutive of human beings. He focuses on the essence of which the passion is an aberration or perversion. In order to understand this primordial state imagination is necessary, i.e. “the imagination of innocence or a ‘kingdom’ wherein the quests for having, power, and worth would not be what they in fact are.” This imagination of the sphere of fallibility as different from that of actual fault again shows Ricœur’s interest in the possible: “In imagining another state of affairs or another kingdom, I perceive the possible, and in the possible, the essential.” The terms “possible” and “essential” also remind us clearly of Ricœur’s description of the phenomenological approach. Thus, this investigation into human fallibility seems to confirm that Ricœur’s analysis of the pure structures or essences may be interpreted as nourished by a hope for the possible, for innocence beyond the reality of fault. Ricœur’s

55 Ricœur calls the method of this philosophical anthropology largely that of a “transcendental reflection,” i.e. approaching the functions of knowing, acting and feeling via the object which is intended by these functions. This reflection shows on the object that in the subject which is the condition of possibility of the object (e.g. HF 36, FM 18).

56 HF 95, FM 78. Cf. also HF 92, FM 75. A similar distinction is that between “anthropology from a pragmatic point of view” and a philosophical anthropology (HF 127, FM 111).

57 HF 93, FM 76. Cf. HF 160, FM 144.

58 HF 93, FM 76.

59 HF 127-141, FM 111-125.

60 HF 127, 128, FM 111, 112.


62 HF 128, FM 112.
summarising remark at the end of *Fallible Man* may illustrate this: “however primordial badness may be, goodness is yet more primordial.” Ricœur’s later writings contain many similar expressions: e.g. *SdM* 306, *SE* 156.

*A Fallible Man* concludes Ricœur’s investigation of the pure structures. As we have seen, this investigation reveals a great deal about Ricœur’s view of evil in spite of the fact that it does not get at the reality of evil itself. The clarification of the primordial structures contributes to the understanding of evil itself; for “the primordial is the original, the pattern, the paradigm starting from which I can generate all evils” and evil is the deviation or fall from this primordial state.

From this short investigation into the works preceding *The Symbolism of Evil* we can already infer important aspects of Ricœur’s view of evil. Ricœur’s approach to the theme of evil is gradual. First, evil should be bracketed so that the fundamental structures may be analysed. Only then, in a second step, can evil itself be studied, for which, however, a new method is needed. This gradual approach reveals how problematic the theme evil is for philosophy in Ricœur’s view: Why can pure essences be described directly and the reality of fault not? Is there not a different kind of description that fits this reality? Why is a different method needed? Why is reflection on evil so problematic according to Ricœur? I think we can clarify this if we remind ourselves of the absurd, unintelligible character of evil mentioned above: evil is the misuse of the fundamental structures. It is absurd that human beings who have these structures — on the basis of which they may be called good by nature — in fact commit evil and are marked by fault. Reflection should be able to account for this absurd nature of evil. In order to do so, Ricœur first analyses the background against which evil appears as absurd, i.e. the fundamental human possibilities. But how can the absurdity itself be described? Such a description appears to entail several dangers. First, it runs the risk of suggesting that we can comprehend evil, which would mean a diminishing of its absurdity. As the seriousness of evil is closely related to its absurdity, any description would find it difficult to take evil seriously. Secondly, a description would run the risk of suggesting that evil is necessary. And, as I indicated above, by no means does Ricœur want to suggest this: he contrasts evil with a primordial pure state in order to make clear that evil is never something to which human beings

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63 HF 161, FM 145. In Ricœur’s later writings we find many similar expressions: e.g. *SdM* 306, *SE* 156.

64 HF 159, 160, FM 143, 144.

65 See p. 26, note 35 above.
are condemned. He wants “to understand freedom and evil by each other.” This formulation sounds ethical. However, as became clear above, the more or less obvious approach to evil via ethics is problematic as well, according to Ricœur. Ethics “arrives too late,” i.e. it arrives after the fall and is not first of all interested in what Ricœur calls “the leap from fallibility to the already fallen.” This means that, after this first stage of the investigation in which evil was consciously bracketed, the approach that is to be taken in the new stage in which evil is itself the object of investigation is not immediately clear. How can philosophy reflect on evil while taking its absurdity into account?

2.1.2. From Fallibility to Fault

Crucial for Ricœur’s way out of the difficulties regarding a philosophical approach to evil is his focus on the moment of the “avowal” or “confession” (aveu) of evil. This is the moment of explicit recognition that the evil committed is my evil. As such, the avowal of evil seems to indicate precisely the moment of transition from fallibility to fault, from innocence to guilt. This means that it may be the “field” in which we can best analyse the absurd character of evil. Here one may find an answer to the question of how this absurd transition from innocence to guilt is possible. Moreover, avowal understands evil in terms of freedom: avowal is the act by which human beings admit both that they are responsible for having committed evil and that not committing evil depends on them. Avowal seems to be the moment that may reveal something about why one would commit evil if one does not need to. Finally, avowal seems to be the very moment in which evil becomes manifest, in which it becomes a problem. “Evil’s place of manifestation is apparent only if it is recognised, and it is recognised only if it is taken up by deliberate choice.” Thus, by focussing on avowal the danger of regarding evil as a necessity seems to be avoided as well. Because of these characteristics avowal seems at first sight to be a good starting point for Ricœur’s investigation into the reality of evil. In the course of this investigation of the language of avowal it has to be found out

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66 HF 14, FM xlvi.
67 HF 159, FM 143.
68 E.g. HF 10, 15, 16, 159, FM xlii, xlvii, xlix, 143; SdM 167, SE 3.
69 HF 15, FM xlvi.
70 HF 14, 15, FM xlvi.
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whether it indeed provides an opening for philosophy to catch the moment of transition from fallibility to fault. This investigation takes place in the second volume of Finitude and Guilt entitled The Symbolism of Evil.

This focus on the language of avowal subsequently reveals which new philosophical method Ricœur is going to use in order to investigate evil. From the moment he introduces this notion of avowal Ricœur points out that it is expressed in symbolic language. It is important to look more closely at the symbolic nature of this language of avowal. How does Ricœur arrive at this characterisation? Already in the introduction to Freedom and Nature Ricœur suggests that fault is of the same concrete nature as innocence and can only be described in a “concrete mythics.” But he does not elaborate here on why this is so and on what this mythics consists in. In the introduction to Finitude and Guilt, subsequently, he professes that by that time he did not yet know the reasons for this detour around mythical language. Still, Ricœur apparently had a strong intuition that the natural language for expressing evil is symbolic: it is this subject of evil which compels him “to inquire into the structure of symbolism and myth.” However there is no separate, more precise elaboration of the question of why this is so in his later works either. Rather, he searches for powerful examples of this symbolic language of evil and devotes The Symbolism of Evil to an analysis of these examples. This book is therefore not a theoretical treatise on the question of the symbolic nature of the language of evil. The analysis of the specific symbolic expressions, which he chooses more or less intuitively, must throw light on this question. The method of investigation of the avowal must be able to take its symbolic nature into account.

The symbolic nature is not the only striking aspect of the language of avowal. It is also remarkable that in The Symbolism of Evil this language turns out be religious in nature. This book opens with the question of how to make the transition from fallibility to fault. Ricœur’s

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71 HF 10, FM xlii.
72 VI 28, 31, FN 26, 28.
73 HF 10, FM xlii.
74 Paul Ricœur, “From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language,” op. cit., 88.
75 Ricœur does mention questions like this in the introduction to Finitude and Guilt: e.g. “Indeed, why can ‘the passions,’ which affect the will, be spoken of only in the coded language of a mythics?” Moreover, he adds that “these are the methodological questions that dominated the elaboration of this/that work (cet ouvrage)” (HF 10, FM xlii). However, this domination is not shown in a separate elaboration of these questions.
answer is: "We will try to surprise the transition in the act by ‘re-enacting’ in ourselves the confession (aveu) that the religious consciousness makes of it." Remarkable as this religious nature may be, Ricœur elaborates on it no more than he does on the symbolic nature of the language of evil; somehow both aspects are self-evident for him. He simply finds religious, symbolic language when looking for expressions dealing with evil. And he does not give a separate, theoretical explanation for this connection between evil, religion and symbolism. The explanation for this connection will consist for the major part in his analysis of these religious symbols themselves. In this analysis, and not in an abstract treatise, it must become clear as to why the theme of evil figures in a religious context and is expressed in symbolic language.

How does Ricœur then approach this religious and symbolic language of avowal which must give him access to the reality of evil? He characterises his approach as hermeneutical. My remark above concerning the intuitive character of Ricœur’s choice of symbolic expressions reveals an important aspect of this hermeneutical approach. This intuitive method of working can only prove itself in its actual application. Hermeneutics starts from the texts — in the case of the early Ricœur: symbols and not yet texts — that are connected with a specific theme and interprets them. In order to be able to interpret and understand these texts it is necessary to believe in them, to put one’s trust in them — the classical formulation of the hermeneutical circle. Ricœur’s starting with symbolic, religious language without giving detailed reasons for it seems a good illustration of this hermeneutical belief. This belief is not the same as that of the original belief in the symbols; the “immediacy of belief” has been lost. Characteristic for the belief of hermeneutics is a “second naïveté” which has gone through critical thinking but which also wants to reappropriate the meaning of the “fundamental symbols of consciousness.” Thus the concrete mythics announced in *Freedom and Nature* eventually takes the

76 SdM 167, SE 3.
77 “First there are symbols; I encounter them, I find them; they are like the innate ideas of the old philosophy” (SdM 182, SE 19).
78 Ricœur mentions this explicitly in the conclusion of *The Symbolism of Evil* (SdM 482, SE 351). Note that Ricœur’s formulation of the circle sounds religious because of the term “belief” (croyance). Greisch points out that Ricœur’s formulation should not be reduced to its religious connotation; it expresses a “belief in the meaning” (croire au sens) (Jean Greisch, *Paul Ricœur. L’itinérance du sens* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon 2001) 138).
79 SdM 482, SE 351.
80 SdM 482, SE 351.
form of a hermeneutical interpretation of classical symbols of evil. By re-enacting and reappropriating these symbols hermeneutics "entertains the project of a revivification of philosophy." Ricœur emphasises that this hermeneutical analysis is "not yet the philosophy of fault" but only a "propedeutic." His aim is to integrate this propedeutic into the reflection he had started in the first two volumes of his \textit{Philosophy of the Will}. This would require another book.

However, this book never appeared an integral part of the \textit{Philosophy of the Will}, i.e. as the third volume of \textit{Finitude and Guilt}. After the hermeneutical interpretation of the symbols of evil he could not simply return to his prior abstracting, phenomenological reflection. Being involved in the interpretation of ambiguous language aroused his interest in a different kind of philosophy and a different main subject. His attention shifted from a philosophy of the will dealing with the structures of the will to a hermeneutics dealing with the problem of language as such. At first, the problem of how to integrate the findings of the hermeneutical analysis of symbolic language of evil into philosophy was still prominent. But, gradually, he focused on the development of hermeneutics as a separate philosophical method. Another aspect that Ricœur had postponed to the third part of \textit{Finitude and Guilt} was an investigation into ways of dealing with evil other than that of the symbolic mode of expression. He promised a separate inquiry into the human sciences, psychoanalysis, criminology, and political science. His interest in those

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81 SdM 482, SE 351. The meanings of the two terms "re-enacting"/rêpeter and "reappropriation"/réappropriation are very close to each other. The second is only a more active term which emphasises that the hermeneutical activity to win back the meanings of the symbols is also an effort; in the following I use the second term mostly.

82 SdM 181, 182 (167), SE 19 (3).


84 Cf. Paul Ricœur, "From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language," op. cit., 87, 88. This article consists in an analysis of the reasons for this shift in method and subject. Ricœur gives four reasons: 1) his dealing with psychoanalysis and its use of "symbolic structures" like dreams 2) the rise of structuralism in France at the cost of existentialism and phenomenology 3) his interest in religious language 4) his interest in the Anglo-American philosophy of ordinary language because of its value as a reply to "the excesses of structuralism" and as "a renewal of phenomenology."

85 HF 12, 13, FM xlv, xlv.
disciplines is clearly visible in the rest of Ricœur’s work. But it did not take the form of a final part of *Finitude and Guilt* with evil as its main theme.\(^{86}\)

The hermeneutical approach has far-reaching consequences for the kind of philosophy Ricœur now develops. First, it is important to realise that this philosophy lets itself be instructed by reflection that originates outside philosophy. Avowal, or confession, is not primarily a philosophical category. From Ricœur’s choice for religious texts we may infer that he thinks avowal to belong in the context of religion. In this context avowal is not just found among learned believers or in texts that show a high degree of reflection. Ricœur distinguishes between more and less elaborate expressions of the avowal or confession of evil. The primary, symbolic expressions must be distinguished from the more elaborate level of the myths of evil. The level that shows the most reflection is called speculation.\(^{87}\) Ricœur emphasises that “it is the whole circle” of expressions “that we must understand.”\(^{88}\) The most reflective expressions cannot be comprehended independently of the primary, symbolic ones. This means that philosophy cannot start directly with the most elaborate, speculative expressions. In order to be able to use them in a meaningful way, philosophy must understand the previous expressions on which speculation builds.\(^{89}\) The pre-philosophical expressions make clear that experiences of evil are expressed only indirectly, in symbols. Thus such expressions provide the key for the interpretation of highly reflective expressions: they protect the philosopher from the danger of misinterpreting the speculative expressions of evil as direct language.\(^{90}\)

\(^{86}\) In the general introduction to *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur also speaks of his *Philosophy of the Will* as comprising an eidetics, an empirics, a mythics, and a poetics (e.g. VI 28 n.3, 32-36, FN 26 n.13, 29-34; cf. Greisch, *Paul Ricœur. L’itinérance du sens*, op. cit., 40). Although parts of the volumes of the *Philosophy of the Will* may be related to these terms it is clear that these terms do not correspond precisely to how the *Philosophy of the Will* actually developed.

\(^{87}\) It is important to note that Ricœur uses the term “symbol” both in a broad and a narrow sense. In the narrow sense “symbol” refers to the least elaborate level of expressions, i.e. symbols as distinct from myths and speculation. But Ricœur also uses “symbol” to indicate the whole circle of expressions, i.e. symbols, myths and speculation: all three forms make use of symbolic language. Cf. also p. 48 below.

\(^{88}\) SdM 173, SE 9.

\(^{89}\) SdM 168, SE 4.

\(^{90}\) The philosophical value of pre-philosophical expressions is something that Ricœur already recognised in *Fallible Man*. This book deals with the pre-philosophical level of understanding in the form of the “pathétique of misery” (HF 21-34, FM 1-15). Although the attention he pays to it there is modest in comparison with the profound analysis of myths and symbols in *The Symbolism of Evil*, the value attached to this level of myth and
rhetoric is great: philosophical reflection cannot equal it in depth. Nevertheless, reflection is necessary to bring clarification and coherence to the darkness and complexity of the pre-philosophical expressions.

91 I will return to Ricœur’s view on the question of the problematic character of speculative accounts of evil below in section 2.4.

92 SdM 182, 480, SE 19, 348. In the article “The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I” Ricœur mentions the Cartesian and Husserlian philosophy as examples of this “philosophy of the point of departure” (CdI 283, 284, CoI 288).

93 SdM 185, 186, SE 22- 24.
of language. Beginning with this fullness means remembering it, rediscovering it. This is truly something active, an interpretative task, and does not result in an attitude that fails to give account of one’s presuppositions. Rather, it means accepting the fact that there can be no absolute or radical beginning for philosophy, because it is always already embedded in a language and a culture.

Finally, choosing the pre-philosophical symbolic expressions as the starting point of reflection is an alternative for a direct introspective approach. Ricœur’s reticence regarding such an approach may be clarified by his affinity for what may be called the tradition of reflective philosophy. He describes this philosophical tradition as “the mode of thought stemming from the Cartesian cogito and handed down by way of Kant and French post-Kantian philosophy.” The movement of reflective philosophy is very diverse and can hardly be encapsulated within one single description. Ricœur describes the central problem of reflective philosophy as that of how to understand oneself as “the subject of the operations of knowing, willing, evaluating, and so on.” Reflective philosophy in the sense Ricœur, referring to Nabert, understands it, would at first give a negative answer to this question: not by means of direct, immediate introspection or reflection on oneself do we come to know ourselves. The reason human beings cannot know themselves directly is that they cannot call themselves to mind as a clear, transparent entity. Human beings are lost to themselves in all their different longings, desires and actions, in the midst of their objects; they are not given to themselves as a whole. They need to recover themselves or, in Ricœur’s terminology, to reappropriate themselves. That is why reflection is more a task than something that is given through clear intuition. The Cogito of Cartesianism must not be overvalued. In the Cogito the fact that I am there is much more a problem than a clear truth; it is still empty. I can know myself only via the roundabout way of my objects, works and acts by means of

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95 We find this characterisation in a later text: “De l’interprétation” (TA 13-39) translated as “On Interpretation” (FTA 1-20) TA 29, FTA 12. Its most striking representative, according to Ricœur, is Jean Nabert.
96 On interpretation” TA 29, FTA 12.
98 Cf. the importance of the notion of reappropriation in understanding the symbols, see pp. 34-35, notes 80, 81 above.
which I constitute myself. The act of constituting, of giving meaning to oneself, is the object of reflective philosophical study. Ricœur describes the process of coming to know oneself as a process of recovering or reappropriation. The reappropriation of oneself proceeds via the objects. These objects, however, are not clear themselves; they need to be interpreted. This is what happens, according to Ricœur, in the act of self-reflection: the ego reappropriates himself by means of his interpretation of his objects. It is very important to note that, for Ricœur, reflection thus already means interpretation. Its aim is “to seize the ego in its effort to exist, in its desire to be.” This can be done only by interpreting the ambiguous meaning of the works in which human beings express this effort and desire. It seems that this interpretation of our works is pre-eminently necessary in the case of evil, because evil — as the absurd — seems pre-eminently a moment in which we lose ourselves and are not transparent for ourselves. Thus, Ricœur’s hermeneutical approach may also be understood from his background in reflective philosophy. Now that we have seen the general consequences of Ricœur’s turn to the language of evil we will take a closer look at the symbolic character of the avowal and the way Ricœur deals with it.

2.1.3. The Symbols of Evil

It has become clear now that for several reasons evil is a theme which is difficult to approach in philosophy, according to Ricœur. His solution of starting his philosophy of evil with an analysis of the language of the avowal of evil must bring relief to this difficult situation. The Symbolism of Evil consists in an extensive analysis of this avowal: a wide range of symbols and myths originating from classical texts or images of our Western culture. Ricœur deals with symbols and myths from the ancient Middle East, the Bible, and from ancient Greece. This entails a limitation of the scope of his research. But as we have seen, according to Ricœur one should not “be scandalised by the contingent constitution of our memory.” Philosophy is always oriented because it is in conversation
with the culture of which it is a part. It is better to acknowledge this orientation explicitly than to strive for some impossible objectivity which considers itself to be above all contingency. As Ricœur sees himself rooted in the Western religious tradition, he uses major examples from this tradition. He does not try very hard to justify the choice of specific symbols nor does he claim to be exhaustiv. But by means of the symbols he has chosen he thinks it is possible to gain insight into the ways in which human beings may experience evil. This use of the symbols implies a specific view of their significance. He regards them as expressions of a general experience. This is a demythologised view of these symbols and myths: it distances itself from the way the symbol figures in the cult. As regards myths, they are treated as stories that are no longer explanations of reality. Still, according to Ricœur, they do have an exploratory function: they reveal something important about human beings. Ricœur describes the way he wants to deal with symbols as

103 SdM 186, SE 24.
104 Ricœur argues only that “our philosophy is Greek by birth.” Subsequently, he says that “the encounter of the Jewish source with Greek origin is the fundamental intersection that founds our culture. … This is why the history of the consciousness of fault in Greece and in Israel will constantly be our central point of reference; it is our ‘nearest origin’…” (SdM 182, 183, SE 20). In relation to the cultural contingency of his selection of symbols Ricœur remarks: “Moreover, I do not know them all; my field of investigation is oriented, and because it is oriented it is limited” (SdM 182, SE 19, 20).
105 SdM 169, 310, 482, 484, SE 5, 162, 350, 352, 353. The idea that myths are a voicing of an experience that we may still recognize in our times can be found with a number of thinkers about myth. For example, M. Leenhardt — to whom Ricœur refers, e.g. SdM 313, SE 166 — speaks of myth in terms of a lived experience (expérience vécue) and emphasises that myth is something of all times (cited in Kees W. Bolle, “Myths and Other Religious Texts,” in: Frank Whaling (ed.), Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion, Vol. I: The Humanities (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers 1984, 297-363) 317). The idea that in order to be able to understand myth it is necessary to make its underlying experience one’s own experience can be found, for example, in G. van der Leeuw (id. 319). Eliade also stresses that a mythical experience lies behind the mythical stories (id. 317). The theme of the demythologisation of myths was also alive in the 1950s because of the work of, among others, Bultmann. According to him, demythologisation implies an existential reduction, which lays bare what human beings are. Although Ricœur sympathised with Bultmann in this period, he is less reductionist in his interpretation of myth; he is not interested primarily in the existential layer of myths but in their symbolic layer which has to be distinguished from the layer of pseudo-knowledge. This implies a more respectful attitude towards the mythical aspect than Bultmann has. Rasmussen correctly points to this difference between Bultmann and Ricœur, although he seems to overstress the point in the end (David Rasmussen, Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology. A Constructive Interpretation of the Thought of Paul Ricœur (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1971) 2-20).
106 SdM 169, SE 5.
follows: “The philosopher adopts provisionally the motivations and intentions of the believing soul. He does not feel them in their first naïveté; he ‘re-feels’ them in a neutralised mode, in the mode of ‘as if’.” In this demythologised way symbols and myths can become part of “modern thought.”

Still, however revealing these old symbols and myths may be as to some general experience, is there not a more contemporary access to this experience? Why do we need these symbols and myths from long ago in order to gain understanding of evil? Are there not more recent examples of the language of confession? Ricœur does not pose the question in this way. Perhaps he would not deny that recent texts and images may also be a possible way for gaining understanding of evil. But his recourse to the old symbols and myths is not arbitrary; it is motivated by a specific view of our present time and this is a critical view. Ricœur portrays our present, modern period as a time of “forgetfulness and restoration.” By “forgetfulness” he indicates the fading of what may be called the dimension of the sacred. We are currently concerned mainly with mastering and controlling the world by means of great variety of technical skills. This attitude of mastery tends to forget about that which cannot be mastered, about “the signs of the sacred.” According to Ricœur this also means a loss of an important view of human beings, i.e. the human being as belonging to the sacred. Therefore, he argues in favour of a “recharging” of our language, i.e. “to start again from the fullness of language.”

I already mentioned this fullness in relation to Ricœur’s view of philosophy as without any radical beginning and with presuppositions. Here

108 SdM 169, SE 5.
109 SdM 480, SE 349.
110 For this notion of the sacred Ricœur is indebted to Mircea Eliade’s “phenomenology of the sacred.” In this phenomenology the idea of restoration of meaning is central (David Rasmussen, Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology, op. cit., 94). The meaning of the sacred is found in the symbols. The interpretation of the symbols should not try to get behind them but must understand the meaning the symbols give (id. 42). However, Greisch points out that Ricœur’s connection with this phenomenology of the sacred is not without question. Ricœur does not agree with its tendency for a structural, ahistorical approach to the sacred (Jean Greisch, Le buisson ardent et les lumières de la raison. L’invention de la philosophie de la religion, Vol. III: Vers un paradigme herméneutique (Paris: Cerf 2004) 764, 765). It is perhaps for this reason that Ricœur remarks that he does not first of all borrow Eliade’s distinction between the sacred and the profane but his conception of the symbol as a fundamental structure of religious language (“Intellectual Autobiography,” op. cit., 17; “Autobiographie intellectuelle,” op. cit., 31).
111 SdM 480, SE 349.
112 SdM 481, SE 349.
we find thus another reason for Ricœur's philosophy with presuppositions: the return to the fullness of language is necessary because it is not alive anymore. This means, clearly, that the situation of forgetfulness is not hopeless according to Ricœur. The time of forgetfulness is also the time of restoration. Precisely in our modern period we are able to reappropriate the fullness of language by means of different kinds of methods of discovery: “philology, exegesis, phenomenology of religion or psychoanalysis of language.” Ricœur does not indicate why forgetfulness and restoration are acute especially where the theme of evil is concerned. But it seems that this is so for him because the dimension of the sacred is implied in the theme of evil; one can think here of the religious character of the avowal or confession. Ricœur describes evil in the introduction to *The Symbolism of Evil* as “the sensitive point and, as it were, the ‘crisis’ of the bond between the human being and what he considers sacred.” He also mentions this relation between evil and the sacred at the very beginning of his *Philosophy of the Will*, in the introduction to *Freedom and Nature*. Here he argues that fault and Transcendence cannot be dissociated and that, in one aspect, “the integral experience of fault is the fault experienced as before God, that is, as sin.” Thus, it seems that to get at the language of the avowal of evil a restoration of our language is pre-eminently necessary — the reason why Ricœur turns to the ancient symbols and myths at the roots of our Western culture.

Still, the idea that these ancient symbols give insight into a general experience of evil remains hypothetical or, in Ricœur’s words, a wager. Ricœur formulates it as follows: “I wager that I shall have a better understanding of the human being and of the bond between the being of the human being and the being of all beings if I follow the indication of symbolic thought.” This wager must be subsequently verified in philosophical reflection. Ricœur summarises this endeavour for verification with the Kantian term “transcendental deduction,” i.e. “justifying a concept by

113 SdM 481, SE 349.
114 SdM 483, SE 352. Cf. p. 34, note 80 above.
115 SdM 169, SE 5.
116 VI 31, FN 29. Ricœur adds that Transcendence is above all “what liberates from the fault.” I will take up this aspect of the relation between the sacred and deliverance from evil in the final chapter.
117 “Je parie que je comprendrai mieux l’homme et le lien entre l’être de l’homme et l’être de tous les étants si je suis l’indication de la pensée symbolique” (SdM 486, SE 355).
showing that it makes possible the construction of a domain of objectivity.”\textsuperscript{118} Still, Ricœur remarks that this expression is “not absolutely satisfactory.”\textsuperscript{119} It suggests that the justification of the approach via symbols means “a simple augmentation of self-awareness.” But the hermeneutical approach is not just a continuation of and contribution to the movement of self-reflection but also a change in the idea of a “purely reflexive ‘know thyself’.”\textsuperscript{120} Hermeneutics means directing one’s attention to the expressions of the self, the symbols, and recognising their revealing power. The symbols reveal something new, open up a dimension that would remain closed without them.\textsuperscript{121} In the case of evil, the revealing power of the symbols relates again to a hopeful view of evil. They reveal that it is impossible to reduce evil to the “dimensions of finitude,” like “error, habit, emotion, passivity.”\textsuperscript{122} Ricœur’s passion for the possible can be recognised behind this remark. He makes the wager that the symbols that express evil in terms of a “servile will” are important for understanding human evil.\textsuperscript{123} The symbols must enable reflection on evil which clarifies the transition from innocence to fault. The symbols may initiate this process of clarification because they “give rise to thought.”\textsuperscript{124} The symbol gives something that may be indicated by the term fullness of language.\textsuperscript{125} Subsequently, this fullness can be made fertile for philosophy by interpreting it in hermeneutical reflection.

I remarked above in passing that symbols open up experiences that would remain closed without them. This is indeed how Ricœur formulates it.\textsuperscript{126} “This remark seems to imply that symbolic expressions are indispensable for expressing experiences of evil. Is this what Ricœur means?
Is there an intrinsic relation, in Ricœur’s view, between symbolic language and the avowal of evil? I have already stated that the language of avowal is religious in nature. Ricœur views evil as a crisis in the bond with the sacred. The language of evil thus seems to arise in a religious context. Although Ricœur does not draw general conclusions in this respect, it seems that religious language often turns out to be symbolic in nature. At least, Ricœur calls symbols “signs of the sacred” and “hierophanies.” Thus, in Ricœur’s view, one need not be surprised to find symbolic language in expressions of evil. But there seems to be another relation between experiences of evil and symbolic language. In Ricœur’s view, symbolic language is opaque. This is the result of its double intentionality: a symbol contains a “first, literal, obvious meaning” which points “analogically to a second meaning which is not given otherwise than in it.” Now this opaque character of symbolic language suits the opaque character of experiences of evil. This suitability must not be understood in the sense that the language doubles the experience. Rather language and experiences of evil are counterparts. Experiences of evil are characterised by Ricœur as blind, equivocal or complex, and scandalous. Expressions of evil, on the other hand, give sight to this experience, which would remain blind without these expressions. Moreover, they articulate the different meanings that are present in the experience. And, finally, they express the scandalous experience of alienation in the form of interrogation; they transform the alienation into questions. Thus, precisely the symbols “rescue feeling and even fear” from the “silence and confusion” that threaten the experiences of evil. This suitability of the symbols as regards the theme of evil also clarifies Ricœur’s objections to philosophical approaches to evil that start with “the most rationalised
expressions." In Ricœur’s view, these expressions may appear rational but should be seen in line with the least elaborate expressions from which they evolved, i.e. the symbols. Thus, the symbolic character of the expressions of evil is not something accidental but a distinctive feature of them. “Whether evil be passively endured or actively committed, whether it be a question of ethical evil or suffering, the only access to the experience of evil itself is through symbolic expressions.”

This aspect of double intentionality which characterises the symbols is not the only characteristic Ricœur indicates. He gives a short “criteriology” of what he regards as symbols and as it is one of the very few general remarks concerning symbolism in The Symbolism of Evil I will briefly refer to it here. First, he indicates three levels where symbols emerge spontaneously. These levels or zones relate to three dimensions or functions that are “present in every authentic symbol.” The first dimension is the cosmic one, which indicates that symbols arise as interpretations of cosmic events or realities. The sun, the moon, or the sky, for example, may thus be regarded as manifestations of the sacred, as hierophanies. Ricœur emphasises that this manifestation is never without language. But the cosmic manifestation is a very concise, concentrated symbol that may give rise to “innumerable spoken symbols.” This aspect of the symbols is central in phenomenology of religion. Another level at which symbols emerge is that of dreams. This field is the home of psychoanalytical investigation. This manifestation in the psyche should not be opposed to that of the cosmic manifestation but is the same thing; these are two forms of the same expressivity. A third level is that of poetic imagination. While the other two levels show the presence of the symbols, imagination shows them while emerging, i.e. the symbol “in its nascent stage.” Ricœur indicates these levels only very briefly and does not use this classification when analysing the different symbols, myths and speculative accounts. Nonetheless, it gives a short theory of

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137 SdM 174, SE 10.
138 SdM 174, SE 11.
139 Cf. De l’interprétation, op. cit., 23-25, where Ricœur describes the same three functions of the symbol. This remark on the psychic, or oneiric function of the symbols displays Ricœur’s interest in psychoanalysis, which he already mentioned in the introduction to Finitude and Guilt, and which finally resulted in his book on Freud: De l’interprétation (op. cit.).
140 SdM 175, 176, SE 12, 13.
141 SdM 177, SE 14.
symbols. Ricœur completes this short theory by an intentional analysis in which the essence of the symbol is approximated.\textsuperscript{142} In this analysis he emphasises that, first of all, symbols are signs: they stand for something else. This must be understood in the sense of a double intentionality: the first meaning of the symbol points to a second one. The precise relation between the first, literal meaning and the second, symbolic one cannot be objectified according to Ricœur. \textquote{It is by living in the first meaning that I am led by it beyond itself.}\textsuperscript{143} Symbols are not allegories which can be translated in such a way that the translation replaces the symbol. Neither do Ricœur’s symbols have anything to do with symbolic logic: they are not empty, formal signs which may be filled in with different expressions but signs that cannot be replaced by other expressions.

How can hermeneutics analyse these opaque symbols? Ricœur regards his hermeneutical interpretation of the symbolism of evil as in line with \textquote{the spontaneous interpretations that have never been lacking to symbols.}\textsuperscript{144} However, as we already discovered above, there is of course also a difference in comparison to this level of spontaneous interpretation: hermeneutics is critical interpretation, interpretation in the mode of a second naïveté. Still, this does not mean that one should not respect the enigmatic character of the symbol. For Ricœur, this means that his philosophical interpretation of the symbols does not aim at explaining them in terms of their function. Rather, he is interested in the intended object of symbolism. This approach is called descriptive.\textsuperscript{145} Nor does Ricœur’s hermeneutics intend to translate the symbols into unequivocal, non-symbolic language so that this translation could replace the symbol. This would be to treat the symbols as if they were allegories.\textsuperscript{146} In the case of allegories, their meaning can be expressed in direct language which renders the allegory superfluous. The symbolic mode of expression found in both symbols and myths however \textquote{is not reducible to any translation from a language in cipher to a clear language.}\textsuperscript{147} In short, symbols should not be translated but made transparent.\textsuperscript{148} Ricœur thus wants to deal with the symbolism in
a way that takes its specifically symbolic character into account and respects it.

In the following I will examine Ricœur’s hermeneutical analysis of the whole circle of expressions of evil in order to find out what this analysis yields for philosophy. Which dimensions of the range of experiences of evil do they disclose? It is difficult to do justice to the richness of Ricœur’s analysis of the innumerable different texts related to the theme of evil. And Ricœur’s investigation defies any description that wants to get at its essence; perhaps one should not even talk about the “essence” of these images. While Ricœur discusses the symbols and myths in detail, I can indicate them only briefly. By giving clear references in footnotes to the specific passages in Ricœur’s work I hope this examination remains accessible. Moreover, this examination must receive its focus from the coordinating, systematic questions and aims. My general aim is to survey the different dimensions of evil that Ricœur discovers in his analysis of the language of avowal. In this survey I will pay special attention to the opaque or obscure character of evil and the way in which symbolic expressions preserve this obscurity while clarifying it at the same time. I will also examine what the consequences are of the increasing distance from the level of experiences of evil entailed by the sequence symbol, myth, speculation. Subsequently, I ask whether Ricœur’s analysis displays an affinity for or appreciation of specific symbols or aspects of them. Above we saw that Ricœur is interested in a specific notion of evil. Can this notion — for which elements like absurdity as well as hope are important — be recognised in his affinity for specific symbols? Are there symbols in which, according to Ricœur, the moment of avowal is elaborated more deeply or more broadly than in others? By means of these questions I will analyse the enormous amount of material Ricœur provides. However, as I indicated above, in this chapter I will pay scarcely any attention to the aspect of what Ricœur calls “the end of evil.”

display the multiple and inexhaustible intentions of each symbol, to discover intentional analogies between myths and rites, to run through the levels of experience and representation that are unified by the symbol” (SdM 484, SE 353). To this understanding Ricœur subsequently adds “the question of truth”, i.e. the question “do I believe that?” (SdM 485, SE 353, 354).

149 See also note 3 above and note 265 below.
2.2. The Circle of Expressions of Evil: Symbols

Ricœur uses the term “symbol” both in a broad and a narrow sense.\(^{150}\) Until now I have referred to it mainly in its broad sense, i.e. as a designation of the whole circle of expressions of evil. In line with this broad meaning Ricœur attributes a symbolic function to myths and even speaks of the third stage of speculation as containing symbols.\(^{151}\) Now we will turn to symbols in the narrow sense, i.e. the first of the three levels of expressions of evil. Symbols are the most simple and concise forms of symbolic expressions. They are closest to what Ricœur calls the experience of evil.\(^{152}\) This experience can only be known through symbols. The symbols express this experience in images, which Ricœur summarises by single terms like stain, captivity, or deviation. According to Ricœur, these are examples of a reflective use of symbolism and not the naïve or spontaneous forms I mentioned above — indicated by their cosmic, oneiric and poetic function.\(^{153}\) They are part of a larger cultural tradition and are embedded in different kinds of texts. Still, the spontaneous origins may be seen in the reflective forms.

Ricœur distinguishes three main types of symbols in the religious confession of evil: defilement (souillure), sin (pêché) and guilt (culpabilité). Ricœur relates the fact that different types can be distinguished to the complex character of experiences of evil in which different layers may be discerned.\(^ {154}\) Yet his division in types is artificial; although these three types may be distinguished as separate experiences, the distinction should not be overstated. Ricœur’s aim is to show that at the moment one distinguishes these types one also finds elements of one type in the others. But it is necessary to distinguish them first. One thus becomes aware of

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\(^{150}\) See p. 36 note 87 above.

\(^{151}\) E.g. the title of the second part of *The Symbolism of Evil* is “The Symbolic Function of Myths”; Ricœur also speaks explicitly of “speculative symbols” (SdM 173, n. 3, SE 10 n. 3).

\(^{152}\) Ricœur is not entirely consistent in his use of the term “experience.” He uses it to denote both the “pre-expressional stage” and the symbolic expressions themselves; he thus speaks e.g. of “l’expérience de l’aveu” (“The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I” Cdl 285, Col 289) and also calls the symbols of evil experiences (e.g. SdM 171 SE 7,8). What is clear is that Ricœur assumes some level “before” or “behind” the expressions, which he calls experience. But we only have access to this level through the expressions. This may explain the fact that he also calls the symbols of evil experiences; for this type of expression is closest to experience.

\(^{153}\) SdM 173, 174, SE 10. See p. 45 above.

\(^{154}\) SdM 171, SE 7.
different aspects or sides of the experience of evil. One may, on the one hand, observe a chronological development in the three types. The symbol of defilement is the oldest, and the viewpoint of culpability can only be understood as the outcome of a long process, as will be shown below. In this chronological development the newer symbol corrects the older one. On the other hand, the correction that the newer form of symbolism brings does not lead to a complete abolition of the earlier one. Aspects of the older views are preserved in the newer ones by means of formulations and images, which results in a mutual correction. Moreover, the different types may exist beside one another. The interrelatedness of the different symbols also becomes clear in that they can be seen as coming together in the concept of the servile will, which I will discuss at the end of this section on the symbols.

2.2.1. Defilement

What does the symbol of defilement reveal about the reality of evil? Of the three types of symbols the meanings of the symbol of defilement seem to be most distant from our contemporary experience and perception. The symbolism of defilement is based on a quasi-material view of evil with which we are no longer familiar — especially because it lacks the element of personal imputation of evil. Defilement depicts evil as something that “infects as a sort of filth, that harms by invisible properties and that nevertheless works in a manner of a force in the field of our undividedly psychic and corporeal existence.” The notions of purity and impurity figure largely in the expressions of this symbol and are linked to rituals of washing and purification. Moreover, defilement is connected to emotions of fear and terror directed at an unpredictable higher power that will revenge itself for the evil one has caused. All these aspects of quasi-materiality, purity, fear, ritual etc. seem to be quite distant from our present-day experience. This is Ricoeur’s conclusion, but he also states that “we still cling to it.” For “dread of the impure and rites

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155 One may observe a similar movement of distinction and subsequently perforation of the distinction made, when Ricoeur distinguishes between different types of myth, see section 2.3.3 below.

156 Thus Ricoeur emphasises that the divergence between the symbol of defilement and that of sin is “phenomenological rather than historical” (SdM 207, SE 47).

157 SdM 189, SE 27.

158 SdM 188, SE 25, 26.

of purification are in the background of all our feelings and all our behaviour relating to fault.” Ricœur is convinced that in the symbol of defilement a world of meanings is opened up which instructs us about important aspects of the experience of evil. Here one finds the first example of Ricœur’s project to fathom these aspects in order to reappropriate or re-enact them in a second naïveté, to rediscover them as parts of our own experience.

A central point in Ricœur’s effort to reappropriate what the symbol of defilement reveals is his observation of the ambiguous character of this symbolism. It oscillates between what Ricœur designates as “physical” and “ethical” approaches to evil. The physical aspects of defilement are, of course, most conspicuous. For example, defilement depicts evil as something that spreads through contact: it sticks to people when they touch something impure. Yet not only human actions but also the behaviour of animals or natural events may cause defilement. This physical evil is thus a kind of evil that one commits unconsciously and involuntarily or that simply happens to people. One may accidentally come in contact with or simply in the proximity of something impure and thus become defiled. From this point of view defilement does not seem to contain any ethical connotations. This perception of evil causes great dread, precisely because evil cannot be controlled. Ricœur calls this the dread of the impure that takes vengeance. This vengeance manifests itself in the suffering that the individual has to endure and at the same time this suffering discloses the mostly unknown defilement and removes it; the suffering has a purifying effect. It is precisely in this relation between the vengeance of the impure and the purifying effect of suffering that ethical elements come into play. Evil is not just experienced as something inscrutable and uncontrollable but also as transgression, vengeance, punishment and expiation. Thus, suffered evil is linked to committed evil. This connection between physical and ethical evil is

162 The distinction between “ethical” and “physical” is first made in relation to dread (SdM 191, SE 30) and is subsequently also used nominally (SdM 199, SE 37). Note that the term “ambiguous” already betrays that this view is no longer self-evident, that we do not share in this experience in which the physical and the ethical are not yet distinguished.
163 This is also clear from the fact that the sexual sphere is so important in “the economy of defilement” (SdM 190, SE 29).
164 SdM 188, 189, SE 26, 27.
165 SdM 192, SE 30.
established by the idea of impurity and by the law of retribution.\textsuperscript{166} Both — the idea of impurity and the law of retribution — still lack any distinction between the physical and the ethical as separate spheres.\textsuperscript{167} In the experience expressed in the symbolism of defilement “evil and misfortune have not been dissociated.” “The ethical order of doing ill has not been distinguished from the cosmo-biological order of faring ill: suffering, sickness, death, failure.”\textsuperscript{168}

One may wonder why Ricœur regards this ambiguity in the symbol of defilement as the starting point for a reappropriation. Is it not precisely this ambiguity — grounded in the idea of retribution — that is unfamiliar to us? That may be the case, but in Ricœur’s view this ambiguity is fundamental to the notion of evil.\textsuperscript{169} The semantic field of evil comprises both suffering and moral transgression in an intertwining that can never be completely unravelled. Moreover, this discovery of ambiguity also throws light on the symbolic character of expressions of evil. Ambiguity is expressed in symbolic language. And it is precisely this symbolic character of the expressions of defilement that enables a reappropriation. This is so, first of all, because this symbolic character enables a continuity between the oldest symbols and the later ones. Ricœur argues that “if, from the beginning, defilement were not a symbolic stain it would be incomprehensible that the ideas of defilement and purity could be corrected and taken up into an interpersonal ethics ….”\textsuperscript{170} The symbol is able to express the ambiguity of both physical and ethical elements because its imagery is essentially itself ambiguous. We have already seen in the general description of the symbol that it contains a double intentionality. In the case of defilement it is the duality of being a stain and at the same time not literally so. The stain can be “washed away” in rites that are more than literal washings. The purity regained in these rites is not simply the absence of filth but also the purity of the heart, of the whole being.\textsuperscript{171} The language of the pure and the impure makes it possible to communicate or teach that which is acted out in the rite. It defines

\textsuperscript{166} SdM 192, SE 31.
\textsuperscript{167} SdM 189, 193, SE 27, 31.
\textsuperscript{168} SdM 189, SE 27.
\textsuperscript{169} SdM 192, SE 31. In a later essay dealing with the theme of evil Ricœur also starts from this ambiguity between evil as wrongdoing and as suffering, as blame and lament (Paul Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” FoS 250; \textit{Le Mal}, op. cit., 14, 15).
\textsuperscript{170} SdM 190, SE 28. Cf. SdM 196, SE 35.
\textsuperscript{171} SdM 196, SE 35.
the pure and the impure and inscribes it in laws. Moreover, this "symbolic language is capable of transmitting the emotion aroused by the sacred." This connection between the experience of the sacred and symbolism is, as I mentioned above, very important in Ricœur's interpretation of these symbols. Thus, in these aspects of delineating the pure and the impure the linguistic foundation is laid for the later stages of the symbolism of sin and guilt. In all these ways the ambiguity discovered in the symbolism of defilement turns out to be of fundamental importance for understanding this symbol, as well as its relation with the other symbols.

A last important moment of reappropriation that should be mentioned is that of the avowal or confession in the symbol of defilement. Defilement seems to have a passive undertone: it regards evil as something that happens to people or that they commit unconsciously. The idea of confession or avowal of evil, on the other hand, seems much more active. Still, in Ricœur's view defilement also displays this confessional moment. He sees this moment in the process of becoming conscious of oneself, of self-interrogation that starts at the moment the individual thinks about which sin may have caused the suffering he experiences. This thinking puts the notion of retribution under strain. The question is raised as to whether the suffering one experiences is in accordance with the evil committed. Ricœur does not deny that this confession may also have physical aims in the sense that it "operates magically." But ethical aims are present just as well, namely — again — in the notion of retribution. Retribution is not just a scheme of interpretation by which suffering may be understood. It also contains, Ricœur argues, a demand for just punishment, for suffering in accordance with sin. The confessional moment contains this demand when it asks suspiciously: What sin have I committed? Subsequently, this demand for proportionality is deepened when it is pursued towards the idea of an end of evil: suffering should not just be in proportion but also have an end. Thus, punishment may be regarded as taking place within an encompassing order. This sense of order may diminish the feeling of dread which permeates this symbol.

172 SdM 198, SE 36, 37.
173 SdM 198, SE 37.
174 SdM 202, SE 41.
175 Ricœur explains this “magically” as follows: “not by communication to others, or to oneself, of an understood meaning, but by an efficacy comparable to that of lustration, of spitting out, of burying, of banishment” (SdM 202, SE 41).
176 SdM 203, 204, SE 43.
Remarkably, Ricœur uses the word “hope” in this context.\textsuperscript{177} The horizon of the confession is the hope for an eschatological future without fear. This combination in the act of confession of the recognition of evil on the one hand and the hopeful yearning for its end on the other reminds of several aspects we mentioned above as characteristic of Ricœur’s approach to evil. Evil is not only seen as something that is always, necessarily, there. Even at this level of defilement, where evil seems to be depicted primarily as material and uncontrollable, there are also opposite tendencies. These become stronger in the subsequent stage of the symbolism of sin.

2.2.2. Sin

Ricœur characterises the symbolism of sin by means of the designation “before God.”\textsuperscript{178} With this designation he has in mind, first of all, the situation of the people of Israel whose relationship with God is determined by the covenant.\textsuperscript{179} This covenant implies a mutual relationship between God and his people. Sin is the violation of this covenant, of the personal bond between God and his people. Therefore, Ricœur calls sin a “religious dimension” which he distinguishes from an ethical or moral one.\textsuperscript{180} The foundation of this dimension is God’s being directed towards human beings. The relationship that thus arises is more than a legislative and juridical one: it is a personal relationship on God’s initiative, which is expressed in the covenant. In order to reappropriate the experience of sin taking place in this context of the covenant, philosophy needs to turn not so much to juridical texts containing different codes but to the “dynamism that produces them:” chronicles, hymns, oracles and sayings.\textsuperscript{181} This “prophetic” literature is distant from philosophy in Ricœur’s view: it is not reflection in the Greek sense — which is fundamental to philosophy — but crying out, threatening, ordering, groaning, exulting.\textsuperscript{182} Thus, again, the movement of reappropriation is not easy. But this prophetic literature leads

\textsuperscript{177} SdM 205, SE 44.
\textsuperscript{178} E.g. SdM 171, 210-213, SE 7, 50-54; “The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I” CdI 287, Col 292.
\textsuperscript{179} E.g. SdM 210, SE 50.
\textsuperscript{180} SdM 212, SE 52.
\textsuperscript{181} SdM 212, SE 53.
\textsuperscript{182} SdM 213, SE 53, 54. Ricœur uses the designation “prophet” in a broad sense, extending it to “such personages as Abraham and Moses” (SdM 213, SE 53).
to the heart of the symbolism of evil: the religious dimension of the symbolism of sin will turn out pre-eminently to be the dimension of confession.

Ricoeur describes the phenomenological difference between the symbol of defilement and that of sin as follows: “Polarly opposed to the god before whom he stands, the penitent becomes conscious of his sin as a dimension of his existence, and no longer only as a reality that haunts him.” Precisely this view of sin as characteristic of human existence is discovered in the confession that takes place before God. Sinfulness as it characterises human existence in the covenant with God is, however, also a reality. Ricoeur distinguishes three aspects of this reality. First, parallel to defilement, sin is viewed as something that is there whether the individual knows about specific sinful acts or not. People also repent of forgotten or unknown sins. Secondly, sin is confessed collectively: it is not so much something of the individual before God as of the group, e.g. the people of Israel. Humankind is united in their sinfulness before God. In this aspect lies the significant difference between the symbolism of sin and that of the subsequent stage of guilt. Guilt is the evil which is revealed by one’s personal conscience; it is a far more subjective category than the objective one of sin. Finally, in the confession this sinful state is regarded as something that is revealed by God’s seeing: when God sees my sins, they come to light. This idea gives rise to the desire to know myself as I am known by God. Thus, the reality of sin expresses the fundamental failing of human beings before God.

However, the situation of human sinfulness is not static; again, we find that this experience of evil is characterised by ambiguity. An important example is the ambiguity of the infinite demand and the finite commandments. The idea of sin as a dimension of human existence is related to the prophetic emphasis on the infinite demand that God makes on human beings within the covenant. In the perspective of this demand human beings are always sinful: they can never meet the demand. Referring to the prophet Amos, Ricoeur concludes: “the unlimited character of the demand reveals how deeply rooted human evil is.” Yet it is distinctive of what Ricoeur calls the ethical moment of prophecy that this
infinite demand is not the only thing: the infinite demand bears strained relations to the finite commandments of the specific codes. And “this tension between the absolute, but formless, demand and the finite law, which breaks the demand into crumbs, is essential to the consciousness of sin.” The specific faults keep the infinite demand from being void; the infinite demand, on the other hand, preserves the code from becoming moralistic. This tension between infinite demand and specific laws again expresses an ambiguity in the confession of evil: “one cannot just feel oneself guilty in general; the law is a ‘pedagogue’ which helps the penitent to determine how he is a sinner.” Another ambiguity is discovered when we find that next to expressions that emphasise the reality of sin are negative images which depict sin as a loss, or absence of something, as “nothingness.” They can be distinguished from those of defilement, because they concentrate on relation and orientation instead of substance and contact, as in e.g. “missing the mark, deviation, rebellion, and straying from the path.” The negative moment is very explicit in the expressions that point to the “nothingness” of the sinner: the sinner is depicted as “a breath of air,” as vain. Ricœur also links the imagery concerning idols to this field of negative images: the false gods are nothing. Parallel to these negative expressions concerning the situation of the human beings and the status of the idols is the notion of God’s wrath.

God abandons human beings, forgets them in response to their abandonment and forgetfulness of God. Still, this wrath of God is pursued within the horizon of the covenant: “the bond of the Covenant is not broken, but stretched, and thus deepened.” From the different expressions related to the symbolism of sin it becomes clear that the relationship between God and human beings which forms the context of this symbolism is stretched by the ambiguous experience of sin. The covenant is a turbulent relationship. Not surprisingly then we often find in Ricœur’s analysis of this relationship terms like tension, paradox, dialectics etc.

187 SdM 218, SE 59.
188 SdM 218, SE 59.
189 “Nothingness” is the translation of the French word néant (SdM 228-238, SE 70-81).
190 SdM 232, SE 74.
191 SdM 234, SE 76. Ricœur also deals with the notion of “the wrath of God” in a separate section, SdM 221-228, SE 63-70.
192 SdM 225, SE 66.
193 In Chapter 6 we will deal with another tension which is the result of the influence of conceptions concerning the end of evil, i.e. the tension between wrath and pardon, threat and promise (Chapter 6, pp. 248, 249).
Ricœur pays quite a great deal of attention to disclosing the continuity between the symbolism of defilement and that of sin. This is in line with Ricœur’s intention, mentioned above, not to regard the differences between the three types of symbols as absolute; rather, after the act of distinction one should discover the continuity between them. This double attention for distinction and continuity is also important for the whole movement of reappropriation that Ricœur attempts to initiate: he wants to show how elements and intentions of the earliest experiences of evil are still present in the later ones. I have already mentioned the continuity between defilement and sin in that evil is regarded as a reality: the fact is that sin is there, independently of our human awareness of it. Ricœur describes this correspondence as a rediscovery or reaffirmation on a new level of the intentions of the symbolism of defilement. A second group of characteristics “re-enforce” this continuity. In order to paint this second line of continuity Ricœur qualifies the opposition made before between sin and defilement as being negative and positive respectively: the vanity of sin is, as a depriving power, not merely nothing but also a potency. The awareness of the potency of the evil power, of its demonic power, is an experience of alteration or alienation from oneself. However, the experience “of the power of sin that binds the sinner … becomes most acute when it is freest of any demonic representations.” One does not need to hold to the belief in demons to retain the element of a binding force. This element is also expressed in images relating to the wickedness and hardness of the human heart which has gone astray and abandoned God. Ricœur attaches the term “tragic” to this view of human beings; in this view “the worst is not only to be feared, but is strictly inevitable, because God and human beings conspire to produce evil.” In the Hebrew Bible this view is present only as a beginning, a trace; it flourishes, of course, in Greek tragedy. Nevertheless, it corresponds to “one of the constitutive experiences of the consciousness of sin, the experience of a passivity, of an alteration, of an alienation, paradoxically blended with the experience of a voluntary deviation, and hence of an activity, an evil initiative.” This experience of alienation foreshadows the later doctrine of original sin in which the element of unclean contact

194 SdM 228, 229, SE 70, 71.
195 SdM 243, SE 86.
196 SdM 244, SE 87.
197 SdM 245, SE 89. In relation to the myths of evil this designation of “the tragic” will return.
198 SdM 246, SE 89.
from the stage of defilement returns as well. This is again a sign of how
the different symbols are inextricably bound up with each other. The
affinities between the symbols of defilement and sin relate to the char-
acter of sin as something real and powerful. In the symbol of captivity
— which originates, for the Israelite context, in the slavery in Egypt —
both these aspects of the reality of the sinful human state and the element
of alienation are expressed. This symbol will turn out to be very cen-
tral to Ricœur's appropriation of the symbols of evil.

2.2.3. Guilt

We already encountered above the most conspicuous characteristic of
guilt in comparison to sin: whereas sin is the "ontological moment" of
fault, guilt is the "subjective moment." Guilt is becoming or being
aware of one's sins. Thus a tendency towards a more internalised view
of evil may be observed in the three symbols: guilt is the most internal-
ised view. From the outset, Ricœur's analysis of the third stage in the
symbolism of evil seems to differ from the others. He does not introduce,
for example, guilt as a symbol or symbolism; neither are symbols promi-
nent in his presentation of the material. As a result perhaps, we do not
see many ambiguities, tensions or paradoxes here, as in the case of the
other symbols. Moreover, the religious dimension threatens to fade away.
It seems in keeping with these notable differences that Ricœur speaks of
guilt as "a veritable revolution in the experience of evil" and "a decisive
event in the history of the notion of fault." In this event tendencies or
processes that started in the other symbols seem to be completed or
pushed to an extreme. There are, certainly, signs of continuity between
the stage of guilt and that of defilement and sin. But the corresponding
elements are so much enlarged that the differences attract more attention.
If it is true that the stage of guilt, in a certain sense, falls outside the

199 I will deal with the notion of original sin in section 2.4 below.
200 There are also connections between the notions of the end of evil in both defilement
and sin: pardon and return can be seen as continuation of ritual expiation and purification
201 SdM 256, SE 101. For a discussion of contemporary reflections on the difference
between sin and guilt cf. Hendrik Johan Adriaanse, "Sünde und Schuld, ein theologischer
Beitrag," in: M.M. Olivetti (ed.), Le don et la dette, Biblioteca dell' Archivio di filosofia
202 SdM 257, 259, SE 102, 104.
scope of the language of avowal this may be revealing as to my question of Ricœur’s appreciation of specific symbols. Is the symbolism of guilt a poorer avowal than that of sin or defilement? Does Ricœur indeed show a preference for specific symbols?

Let us first deepen our understanding of Ricœur’s notion of guilt. Ricœur discusses differences and — in spite of the deviating character of the symbolism of guilt — also the common ground between guilt and the symbols of defilement and sin. With respect to this common ground, Ricœur reveals how the subjective moment of guilt is already present in the other two symbols, albeit only dimly. In the symbolism of defilement it is present in the atmosphere of fear: fear of the punishment that one may suffer because of the impurity with which one has become infected. Ricœur describes this anxious anticipation of punishment as the feeling of being burdened with a weight. This is precisely the feeling of guilt.204 This feeling of fear is an internalised consciousness of evil. This internal character is also present in the symbolism of sin insofar as there is a subjective awareness of the objective sinful state. Guilt may be perceived as the “achieved internality of sin.”205 However, the difference lies in the fact that in the symbolism of guilt the fear and awareness of sin become strictly personal: guilt is the result of my being the “author of” evil.206 It is the awareness that I am fully responsible for the punishment I suffer because I am the one who has committed the sin. This difference is revolutionary because it reverses the relation between punishment and guilt. Guilt is now primary and no longer a derivative of the punishment which one experiences, as it was in defilement. The physical and the ethical, which were interwoven in the other symbols, are now separate. Thus a “dualistic” view emerges in which the “moral agent, author of moral evil, and a course of events that brings sickness, suffering and death” are distinguished.207 This much more personal experience of evil differs from sin: “in place of emphasising the ‘before God,’ the ‘against thee, against thee alone,’ the feeling of guilt emphasises the ‘it is I who…’.”208 If this perspective is predominant, evil is measured in the end only by one’s conscience. Guilt is then a “completely solitary experience” — distinct from the collective character of sin.209 The collective nature of evil dissipates

204 SdM 256, SE 101.
205 SdM 257, SE 103.
206 SdM 257, 258, SE 102, 103.
207 SdM 243, SE 87.
208 SdM 258, SE 103, 104.
209 SdM 258, 259, SE 104, 105.
into individual guilt.\textsuperscript{210} Apart from this division into individual guilt, evil also becomes divided into a detailed series of different degrees.\textsuperscript{211} Whereas sin is the same for every individual, guilt applies to each person in different degrees. This differentiation entails a differentiation regarding punishment. Thus, it is the presupposition of all juridical reasoning. In this way, Ricœur distinguishes between the “realism” of sin and the “phenomenalism” of guilt.\textsuperscript{212} The complete phenomenalism of guilt entails the disappearance of the religious dimension of sin: “guilt in the pure state has become the modality of man the measure,” of the human being who is his own measure.\textsuperscript{213} However, Ricœur emphasises that this pure form of guilt is not found in the religious literature he examines.

After this examination of the relations between the symbolism of guilt and that of sin and defilement Ricœur analyses three historical examples of guilt. Although they are not examples of this pure form of guilt in which the religious dimension is completely absent, they still contain the possibility of the realisation of this extreme. First, Ricœur elaborates the ethico-juridical direction in which guilt may develop; it is exemplified in the “penal experience” of the ancient Greeks.\textsuperscript{214} Ricœur points out how, in this penal system, a purely moral notion of evil arises as a result of a focus “on the civic and the juridical.”\textsuperscript{215} The measure of the punishment is a human one defined by a tribunal in the context of the Greek city; by measuring the punishment, the city measures guilt itself.\textsuperscript{216} This measurement is thus first of all something objective, executed by the tribunal and not by personal conscience: “the tribunal goes before, psychology follows after.”\textsuperscript{217} In this way of thinking, even concepts from a tragic vocabulary are reinterpreted in juridical terms.\textsuperscript{218} Thus, this view of evil tends to a completely ethico-juridical interpretation of evil, although the sacred character of the city prevents it from this completion.
The second direction Ricœur singles out is the ethico-religious interpretation exemplified in the “scrupulous conscience” of Pharisaism. Its ethical side is that of the law which commands; the religious perspective consists in that this law is God’s will, God’s instruction for his people. This instruction covers all parts of human life expressed in an “ethics of detail.” The instruction completely determines the relation between God and human beings so that, Ricœur argues, “God is ethical.” Ricœur calls this experience “scrupulousness,” which he defines as “a general regime of thoroughgoing and voluntary heteronomy.” Finally, this results, according to Ricœur, in a view of the law as not only a demand for perfection but principally as something that human beings can keep. Guilt in this view is only the opposite of merit, which is the “increase in the worth of a human being” that results from doing good: guilt is the decrease of worth, or perdition. Ricœur illustrates this with the example of the idea of “evil inclination” which is not radical in character but rather like “a permanent temptation.” It means that human beings may always repent and change their life. Here lies, in Ricœur’s view, precisely the greatness and limitation of scrupulousness. The limitation is that the relationship between God and human beings is caught in casuistry. Torah, God’s instruction, becomes dependent on the detailed juridical interpretation and legislation by the sages. Thus, it receives the same value as the “unlimited call of the prophets to perfection and holiness.” Ricœur criticises this essentially practical elaboration of the relationship between God and human beings. It tends to “capsize,” to become hypocrisy. This can only be avoided if scrupulousness keeps moving, i.e. continues to develop new ground in new interpretations, with “complete exactitude” and “missionary zeal.” These critical comments on the limitations of this view already seem to reveal that Ricœur in fact distinguishes — as I suggested above — broader or richer forms of avowal

219 Ricœur views Pharisaism as “the crux of a movement of thought which goes from Ezra to the composition of the Talmud” and which shaped Judaism into how we still know it at present (SdM 271, SE 118).
220 SdM 276, SE 123.
221 SdM 279, SE 127.
222 SdM 279, SE 127.
223 SdM 281, SE 129.
224 SdM 281, 282, SE 129, 130.
225 SdM 282, 283, SE 130, 131.
226 SdM 284, SE 132.
227 SdM 284, SE 133.
228 SdM 289, 290, SE 138, 139.
from poorer ones. In his examination of the third elaboration of the notion of guilt these distinctions become clearer.

The question Ricœur poses after having examined the extreme forms of guilt in their Greek and Pharisaical form is whether the tendency towards these extremes — of which Ricœur is clearly critical — reveals something essential about the experience of guilt as such. In dealing with this question Ricœur focuses on the scrupulous elaboration of guilt and confronts it with the apostle Paul’s reversing interpretation. The Pauline view constitutes the third exemplification of the experience of guilt. Paul emphasises the aspect which scrupulousness loses sight of — that of guilt which results from the fundamental inability of human beings to keep the law. Above we came across this aspect as part of the experience of sin and Ricœur, in fact, often speaks of sin in his examination of the Pauline view of guilt. But Paul tries to reveal that it is precisely from the scrupulous dealing with the law — which results in an infinite number of instructions — that a specific experience of this inability follows. The “hell of guilt” begins with the consciousness of the impossibility of total observance of the extremely detailed prescriptions. This consciousness is not part of the experience of scrupulousness itself; it is the view of an outsider like Paul who nevertheless knows scrupulousness from within. From this perspective he reveals the condition of the human being under the multitude of laws as desperate, as cursed. Sin is an inherent problem of the law. The law makes sin manifest; however, what is forbidden also attracts and thus the law reinforces sin. Moreover, the striving to become justified by the law is itself a sin: the sin of self-justification. Thus, from the Pauline perspective, scrupulousness itself becomes a sin: “that is the real meaning of the curse of the law.”

This curse of the law reveals again the difference between sin and guilt. The tension characteristic of sin between the fundamental infinite demand and the secondary finite commandments is destroyed. In the stage of guilt infinite demand is substituted for indefinite enumeration, which results in an indefinite indictment. Moreover, the “before God” of sin is abolished. In the juridical interpretation of law the accusation before the tribunal

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229 SdM 290, SE 139.
230 Ricœur has in mind passages in the letters to the Galatians and to the Romans where Paul regards being under the law as a curse and a source of sin (cf. pericopes in Galatians 3 and 4; Romans 3, 5, 7.).
231 SdM 291, SE 140.
232 SdM 291, SE 140.
233 SdM 292, SE 141.
234 SdM 294, SE 143.
235 SdM 295, SE 144.
is also the accusation before the tribunal of oneself. People examine themselves permanently as to their intentions, which may end finally in a sphere of “distrust, suspicion and … contempt for oneself.” Ricœur contrasts this with the “humble confession of the sinner.” In addition, Ricœur emphasises again that the communal aspect present in the symbolism of sin is lost: this makes the guilty conscience isolated and shut in. It is also shut in because there is no hope, no promise: guilt is enacted within the boundaries of one’s own conscience. The guilty human being is a slave. In the final chapter I will go into the importance of the notion of justification for this revelation of the law as a curse. For now, it is important to note that Ricœur sees in the emphasis on the individual and the juridical dimension of evil an extreme form of experience. The Pauline perspective reveals the problematic, even cursed, character of the guilty conscience, according to Ricœur. Thus the extreme elaboration of Pharisaism indeed reveals something essential about the experience of guilt. Ricœur clearly contrasts guilt with the experience of sin: it is as if guilt forgets about the principal aspects of sin. Does sin then constitute, in Ricœur’s view, the heart of the avowal of evil of which guilt is the boundary? This question is best dealt with in relation to the concept of the “servile will.”

2.2.4. The Servile Will

Ricœur concludes his journey through the symbols with a short section on the concept of the “servile will” (serf-arbitre). In this concept the three symbols are recapitulated, retained and reaffirmed. It reveals the

236 SdM 295, SE 144, 145.
237 SdM 296, SE 145.
238 SdM 296, SE 145.
239 SdM 297, SE 146.
240 SdM 301-306, SE 151-157. Ricœur does not refer to other authors when he introduces the concept of the servile will. He relates it primarily to the biblical imagery of captivity. However, the expression reminds one of Luther’s notion of the servum arbitrium which he developed in contrast to Erasmus’ concept of the liberum arbitrium. Luther thought that the idea of a free will was not in line with Scripture; it cannot be harmonised with the omnipotence of God and the idea that human beings cannot do anything without God’s grace. Although in Ricœur’s argumentation God’s omnipotence and grace are not primary considerations, his idea of serv-arbitre also implies a weakening of the idea of an autonomous free will, because the seductive power of evil is taken into account (cf. Harry J. McSorley, Luthers Lehre vom unfreien Willen, nach seiner Hauptschrift De servo Arbitrio im Lichte der biblischen und kirchlichen Tradition (München: Max Hueber Verlag 1967) 274-337). Note that the term “servile will” is not used in English treatises on Luther’s work; in French, however, the term “serf-arbitre” is used.
241 SdM 301, SE 151.
continuity between the symbols by indicating that towards which all three symbols tend, their “horizon” or “intentional telos.” As such, it is an indirect concept: it cannot be understood directly, as an independent notion, but only on the basis of the symbols. As an independent concept it would short-circuit, as it unites two notions that are mutually exclusive; it is a paradox “insupportable for thought.” Understanding against the background of the symbols of evil this seemingly self-contradictory notion becomes meaningful. It shows the thread running through the symbols of evil. The thread of the servile will expresses the characteristic tension or ambiguity between the involuntary and the voluntary side of evil, between the sinful state and the specific act of transgression. The servile will is the enigma of the “will that makes itself a slave,” “a ‘yielding’ of myself that is at the same time a ‘reign’ over myself.”

Ricoeur unfolds this enigma of the servile will in three directions or schemata; they link up with elements of the symbol of defilement that, however, only emerge in the resumption of defilement in the other symbols. The first schema is that of the “positiveness” of evil. Ricoeur explains this primarily in opposition to the view of evil as being nothing or a lack of being. Contrary to this view, evil may also be seen as “the power of darkness,” as “something to be ‘taken away.’” The second schema points out the “externality” of evil, signifying that “evil, although it is something that is brought about, is already there, enticing.” Evil is there as a seductive power; it is experienced as coming from outside. The symbol of unclean contact expresses this experience of evil as something that one, in a certain sense, undergoes. The third schema finally is that of “infection.” It reveals that “the seduction from outside is ultimately an affection of the self by the self, an auto-infection, by which the act of binding oneself is transformed into the state of being bound.” Each schema expresses another aspect of the involuntary or “servile”
side of the experience of evil. Ricœur does not give a similar elucidation of the voluntary or “will” part. Perhaps this is because he regards this part of experience to be more evident and closer to our contemporary experience. As we have seen in the analysis of the symbols, especially in that of defilement, Ricœur takes pains to show that the experience of servitude is also an important element in the experience of evil — though it may seem strange at first sight for people in our time. The language of the servile will combines the ethical sphere of willing and what may be called the quasi-physical sphere of servitude. It expresses individual responsibility for evil and evil as a power outside human beings which is already there, which seduces, something to which the individual gives in and which thus becomes a state. One easily recognises aspects from all three symbols of evil. The servile will oscillates between these different approaches to evil without residing in one of them.

With the concept of the servile will Ricœur indicates the thread of the confession of evil as expressed in the symbols. Therefore, this concept may throw light on the question of whether Ricœur prefers specific symbols — and if so, whether, this preference is in line with what we found out about his view of evil on the basis of his earlier works. Can the concept of the servile will indeed be seen as expressing something like the heart of the language of avowal? Against this interpretation one may object that the servile will seems especially close to the experience of guilt: it exhibits a very internalised and individualised view of evil. And, as we saw, Ricœur was critical of this tendency of individualisation and internalisation. Still, the concept of the servile will does not express guilt in the way it is elaborated in the Greek penal system or Pharisaism. It seems more in line with the Pauline view of guilt in which enslavement as a state and the act of self-enslaving also go together.251 The aspect of servitude in the servile will seems to preserve it from forgetting about sin as a dimension of human existence and as a fundamental inability to keep the law — a forgetfulness that does appear in the Greek and the Pharisaical experience. As we have seen, the symbolism of sin is characterised by ambiguities or tensions: between infinite demand and finite commandments, reality and nothingness of sin, passivity and activity.252 In the concept of the servile will these tensions are concentrated in the very strong ambiguous pair of servitude and willing. Thus it seems very close

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251 SdM 303, SE 154.
252 See pp. 54, 55 above.
to the symbolism of sin — the symbolism which Ricœur seems to prefer. Yet another objection seems to be that the modality of “before God” — which is central to the symbolism of sin — does not seem to be prominent in the concept of the servile will. However, one should not forget that the concept of the servile will is based on the symbols and that it can only be understood against this background. The ambiguity of the concept — which short-circuits when understood independently — is meaningful only in the light of the symbols. And, as we saw, the image of the servile will especially displays close affinity with the symbolism of sin. Inextricably bound up with this symbolism is the modality of “before God.” Thus, it seems that the concept of the servile will is implicitly religious. Unfortunately, Ricœur does not throw light on this question; apparently, it is not a prominent issue for him. However, in the context of my investigation it is an important question. Hence, I will try to gain a better understanding of why this ambiguous view of evil would be of a religious character. For the moment, it is important to conclude that the ambiguous view of evil seems, in Ricœur’s view, central in the language of the avowal of evil. As a result, his analysis displays a preference for the symbolism of sin.

It seems good to accentuate, at the end of this survey, the symbolic character of the expressions examined. The two central symbols seem to be that of captivity, which is prominent in relation to sin, and that of infection, which is closely tied to the experience of defilement. Ricœur shows how captivity developed from the historical situation of the people of Israel into a symbol which also expresses the situation of the guilty human being. Moreover, in this symbolic sense it is also present in other cultures, where it may be nourished by different historical experiences. In Ricœur’s view, captivity thus expresses something central to the experience of evil. The same is true of the symbol of defilement: in the three schemas of positiveness, externality and infection Ricœur observes key elements of the experience of evil. These elements are all expressed in symbolic language. We may now easily recognise Ricœur’s summary of the relation between the experience of evil and its symbolic expression:

By this threelfold route the living experience of fault gives itself a language: a language that expresses it in spite of its blind character; a language that

\[253\] SdM 302, SE 152.
\[254\] SdM 302, 303, SE 153.
makes explicit its contradictions and its internal revolutions; a language finally that reveals the experience of alienation as astonishing.\(^{255}\)

The symbols are able to express the blind, ambiguous and alienating experience of evil. The indirect concept of the servile will is based on the symbols; as such it is able to express what in direct language would be "insupportable for thought."\(^{256}\) Through the symbols we may reappropriate the underlying complex experience. We followed this route of reappropriation above.

So far, we have not come across any explicit signs of Ricœur’s “passion for the possible,” i.e. his interest in the hope for possibilities beyond or in spite of evil.\(^{257}\) However, at the very end of the section on the servile will, in his analysis of the third schema of infection, we find several remarks that immediately bring to mind the association with this orientation towards hope. Here, Ricœur takes a step further in his interpretation of the schema of infection. He points out that the symbol of defilement may also be regarded as expressing that the ruin of evil is not fundamental: "to infect is not to destroy."\(^{258}\) In spite of the infection with evil, human beings remain human; their fundamental possibilities are not entirely lost.\(^{259}\) However, Ricœur argues that this “ultimate intention of the symbol of defilement … cannot be brought to light and elaborated except by means of the second-order symbols, especially the myth of the fall.”\(^{260}\) We will turn to these mythical symbols now.

### 2.3. The Circle of Expressions of Evil: Myths

Whereas symbols are “spontaneously formed and immediately significant,” myths narrate the “fanciful history” in which these symbols are embedded.\(^{261}\) Ricœur acknowledges that “only at the price of an abstraction” can the symbols be distinguished from the myths.\(^{262}\) He defines myth with reference to the approach of the “history of religions” as:

\(^{255}\) SdM 172, SE 8.
\(^{256}\) SdM 302, SE 152.
\(^{257}\) See note 44 and also p. 43 above.
\(^{258}\) SdM 305, SE 156.
\(^{259}\) Here, Ricœur speaks in terms which he also uses in his interpretation of Kant’s notion of radical evil: “However radical evil may be, it cannot be as primordial as goodness” (SdM 306, SE 156; cf. e.g. Chapter 3, p. 137).
\(^{260}\) SdM 306, SE 156.
\(^{261}\) SdM 181, SE 18.
\(^{262}\) SdM 309, SE 161.
a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of human beings of today and, in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which human beings understand themselves in their world.263

This general definition is further specified in a “working hypothesis” which indicates three functions of the “group of mythical symbols that concern human evil.”264 First of all, these myths are about heroes or ancestors that function as a kind of prototype of the human being: in them the whole of humankind is mirrored. In these stories experiences are universalised; they become archetypical. Secondly, the myths are about the beginning and the end of evil.265 They create a history “from an origin to a fulfilment.”266 Present experience is part of this history: from this history it receives “an orientation, a character, a tension.”267 Thirdly, these myths narrate the enigma of “the discordance between the fundamental reality — state of innocence, status of a creature, essential being — and the actual modality of human beings, as defiled, sinful, guilty.”268 Ricœur summarises the three functions as “concrete universality, temporal orientation, and finally ontological exploration.”269 The third characteristic reminds one of the contrast between evil and the fundamental structures which Ricœur already formulated in *Freedom and Nature* and which turned out to be central to his view of evil.270

The narrative form of the myth — which is what distinguishes it from the symbol — is not accidental. According to Ricœur, myth expresses the enigma of the transition between the fundamental and the historical reality of human beings in a narrative because this transition is not “logical”
and cannot be deduced. Ricœur emphasises that the narrative of the myths cannot be translated into direct, clear discourse. The narrative form of the myths also corresponds to the dramatic nature of the experience of evil itself. This consists in the tension between the experience of evil and a “totality of meaning.” This totality is not given, not experienced: in a symbolic mode the myth “aims at” this totality. Myth narrates this totality of meaning and links it to a “primordial drama,” the drama of the prehistoric time in which the world was founded. Rícœur regards these notions of “totality of meaning” and “cosmic drama” as “the two keys that will help us unlock the myths of the Beginning and the End.” In my analysis of Rícœur’s account I will concentrate on the three characteristics and the two key notions. This approach — which is more a matter of broad outline than was the case with the symbols — allows a concise discussion of what the numerous stories with which Rícœur deals reveal regarding the different dimensions of the experience of evil.

As in the case of the symbols, Rícœur orders his examination of the myths of the beginning and the end of evil by starting from a typology. He distinguishes four types of myths: the myth of the drama of creation, the “Adamic” myth, the tragic myth and the myth of the exiled soul. The first type, the drama of creation, traces evil back to the chaos which existed before the creation of the world. Out of the original chaos, in a “titanic” struggle, the world is created by the gods: this creation is thus an act of salvation. Secondly, with the designation “Adamic myth” Rícœur indicates the biblical story of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Unlike the myth of the drama of creation, evil occurs here in a completed creation. As a result, salvation or the end of evil is not identical

271 SdM 311, SE 163.
272 This is what happens with allegories: they can be translated into clear language that subsequently replaces the allegory. Rícœur concludes this also as regards the symbols. See p. 46 above.
273 SdM 317, SE 170.
274 E.g. SdM 315, SE 167.
275 SdM 318, SE 171.
276 SdM 318, SE 171.
277 Rícœur introduces this typology: SdM 318-321, SE 171-174. Here Rícœur uses a different order than in the following analysis where the tragic myth changes places with the Adamic myth. In his first presentation he departs from the opposition between the drama of creation and the Adamic myth and calls the tragic myth an “intermediate type” that he inserts between the other two (SdM 320, SE 173).
278 In the chapter in which Rícœur discusses this myth he relates this story to many other biblical images and stories. As these are mainly concerned with the end of evil I deal with them in the final chapter.
with the act of creation; it is something independent. These two types therefore seem to be mutually exclusive. The third type of myths is based on the Greek tragedies. Characteristic of this type is the idea that human beings are seduced to evil by the gods. Human beings cannot avoid evil but are nevertheless guilty. Salvation in this type of myth is of a special kind; it is closely related to insight into the inevitable nature of evil. The fourth type, finally, is that of the “exiled soul,” which explains evil by means of the dichotomy of body and soul. The soul, which represents the good, has been imprisoned in the body. The four types are connected with a specific cultural context: the Babylonian, Biblical, Greek and Neoplatonic contexts, respectively. In these specific cultural expressions Ricœur tries to discover certain general or fundamental aspects of the experience of evil. In his view, these aspects come to light especially when the different myths are viewed in relation to one another, when the one is read in the light of the others. Instead of an independent static analysis of each of them Ricœur thus wants to create a “dynamics.”

In this dynamic comparison it turns out that the tragic myth is closest to the Adamic myth, followed by the myth of the drama of creation; the myth of the exiled soul is the most distant from the Adamic myth and stands alone.

In my discussion of Ricœur’s account of the four types I will follow a twofold division: I will deal with the Adamic myth as one “group” and the three others as another. There are three reasons for this division. The first reason has to do with the substance of the different myths. Only in the type of the Adamic myth is evil regarded as becoming actual through a human act for which only human beings themselves are responsible. The other myths do not have this emphasis on a decisive human act from which evil originates. Rather, evil is seen as something that precedes human beings’ coming into existence, as something more or less inherent to the world or to the structure of human existence. Or evil is seen as something to which the gods are also accessories. The Adamic myth, however, may be called “anthropological in the proper sense of the word.”

This is
also the sense in which Ricœur’s designation “Adamic” should be understood: Adam means human being.282

The second reason for distinguishing from the beginning between the Adamic myth and the other three is that this corresponds with Ricœur’s method of an oriented interpretation. The dynamics to which I referred above can only be started, Ricœur argues, if one chooses a perspective from which one listens to the different myths. One should choose a specific myth in order to “be in a position to hear and to understand … the instruction of all the myths together.” 283 In order to understand the myths truly and to reappropriate them, one should look at them not from a neutral, indifferent perspective — which is an illusion — but from a specific orientation. The myth Ricœur chooses for this orientation is the Adamic one. Ricœur accounts for this choice and the belief presupposed by it in different ways.284 The first reason he gives is striking: its account of the origin of evil suits the Christian “gospel of deliverance and hope.”285 In the light of this gospel evil, or sin, is regarded as of only secondary importance for faith: it receives “its full meaning only retrospectively,” looking back from what is primary, i.e. the end of evil or justification.286 Ricœur underscores that this reason is theological; philosophy which “does not pretend to annex Christology” cannot base itself on this reason.287 Aside from this theological reason, he mentions two motives which he relates closely to his own philosophical project of a philosophy of fault. The first is his conviction that the Adamic myth may give better insight into human beings, a better “self-understanding.” But the verification of this conviction is postponed to a later volume of Finitude and Guilt. For the moment, this motive takes the form of a wager — the wager that this myth gives insight, that it has “a revealing power.”288 This insight and revelation is what Ricœur tries to find. In The Symbolism of Evil, however, the only justification of his belief in the pre-eminence of the Adamic myth is the dynamics which it initialises. Apparently, Ricœur thinks that this dynamic view is best realised if one looks at the myths from the perspective of the Adamic myth. We will see the differences and

282 “Adam veut dire homme” (SdM 374, SE 232).
283 SdM 441, SE 306.
286 SdM 442, SE 307. For a discussion of this retrospective view see Chapter 6.
287 SdM 444, SE 309, 310.
288 SdM 443, SE 308. Ricœur uses the term “wager” also in relation to the project of The Symbolism of Evil as a whole (see pp. 42, 43 above).
similarities between the myths that Ricœur sees from this perspective below. But what does this approach from the anthropological myth imply regarding the status of the non-anthropological myths? Ricœur clarifies his approach as follows:

The pre-eminence of the Adamic myth does not imply that the other myths are purely and simply abolished; rather, life, or new life, is given to them by the privileged myth. The appropriation of the Adamic myth involves the appropriation, one after the other, of the other myths, which begin to speak to us from the place from which the dominant myth addresses us.289

Ricœur thus situates himself within the Christian faith and tries to find out and reappropriate what this perspective reveals. This approach to the different myths corresponds with my division in two. The third reason for this division, finally, is of a more systematic nature: the division makes clear different approaches to evil that will function as “interpretative tools” in the following chapters as well.

2.3.1. The Anthropological Myth of the Origin of Evil

The Adamic myth is truly anthropological in that it is about all human beings. Ricœur highlights this aspect.290 The situation in which Adam and Eve find themselves after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, he argues, is that of the present human condition.291 Adam and Eve are the ancestors of the human race and represent all human beings. This corresponds with the first characteristic of the myths of human evil mentioned above and also with the key notion of the primordial drama. In the myth the experience of committing evil is universalised. The first human being “is summed up in one act,” that of taking the fruit and eating it.292 Thus, the myth expresses evil as something characteristic of human beings. Ricœur argues that, in doing so, the Adamic myth builds on the symbols or, more precisely, on the confession of sin as represented in the biblical symbolism of sin.293 This interpretation reveals that Ricœur’s preference for the Adamic myth is in line with his preference for the symbolism of sin. This symbolism prepared, so to say, the way for the Adamic
myth in a negative and a positive sense. Evil is dissociated from the divine sphere: God is holy. The negative contribution is that the perspective of the myth of the drama of creation and that of the tragic myth are thus fundamentally criticised. If evil has nothing to do with God, the blame rests completely on human beings; this is the positive side of the preparatory function. This view, which exculpates God and indicts human beings, was internalised in what Ricœur calls “the spirit of repentance,” i.e. the spirit underlying the symbolism of sin and guilt. Characteristic of this spirit is both the awareness of sin as something collective and the fundamental individual awareness of being a sinner. This universalisation at the level of the symbols thus corresponds to the Adamic myth in which the prototype of all human beings is depicted as a sinner.

Does this interpretation of the Adamic myth as making explicit “the concrete universality of human evil” also take into account that it seems to depict something like the first sin or the origin of evil? On the one hand, Ricœur understands this notion of origin in what may be called an existential sense rather than in a temporal sense: it expresses in his view that evil from the very beginning is something human, that it is committed by human beings and that they are to be held accountable for it. Again this may be seen as an expression of the spirit of repentance: the human being confesses his faults before God who is holy. On the other hand, Ricœur also reads the myth as revealing — in accordance with the third characteristic of myths — a contrast: i.e. that between the primordial good state and the present evil condition. Because the story of Adam and Eve is placed within the framework of a story of creation, there is a certain ambiguity between primordial goodness or innocence and the first sin and the hard life that follows from that sin. Ricœur understands this ambiguity again as revealing something about all human beings, as an ontological exploration: an “anthropology of ambiguity issues from the myth.” This shows Ricœur’s partiality for the Adamic myth as being in line with his preoccupation with the contrast between the primordial and the actual human state. The place of evil in this anthropology is as

294 SdM 380, 381, SE 239.
295 SdM 382, SE 240.
296 SdM 382, SE 241.
297 Ricœur criticises the view of the Adamic myth as a myth of the “fall,” because this corresponds, according to him, with an interpretation of Adam as superhuman figure instead of the companion of all human beings (SdM 374, 375, SE 233).
298 SdM 387, SE 247.
299 Ricœur points out how clearly visible this tension is in the elements of the story concerning the divine interdiction not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
follows: “sin is not our original reality, does not constitute our first ontological status, … does not define what it is to be human being.”\textsuperscript{300} Evil is radical but also contingent: it happens “in the Instant.”\textsuperscript{301} This is clearly an expression of a hopeful view of human beings which the following quote summarises very well:

By the [Adamic] myth anthropology is invited, in the first place, to gather all the sins of the world into a sort of transhistorical unity, symbolised by the first human being; then to put the stamp of contingency on that radical evil; and finally to preserve, superimposed on one another, the goodness of created human beings and the wickedness of historical human beings, while “separating” the one from the other by the “event” which the myth tells of as the first sin of the first human being.\textsuperscript{302}

The contrast finally between the created and the actual state of the human beings may be regarded as corresponding with what Ricoeur calls the totality of meaning with which evil stands in tension.

Until now I have not discussed the second characteristic in relation to the Adamic myth: that of the temporal orientation. Ricoeur understands this in the sense that the myth narrates the beginning and the end of evil. I will go into the details of this aspect in the last chapter. It is immediately clear that the Adamic myth recounts the beginning of evil. But where and how does it depict its end? In Ricoeur’s view, this end of evil becomes visible if the Adamic myth is read as being in line with the prophetic preaching of God’s judgement and mercy.\textsuperscript{303} This “dialectic of
judgement and mercy … is projected into a mythical representation of the ‘beginning’ and the ‘end’. 304 The Adamic myth is thus a retrospective symbol. 305 The Adamic myth forms a whole with other biblical stories in which the notion of an end is narrated. Moreover, in the Adamic myth itself this depiction of evil as having an end is not wholly absent either. Ricœur’s interpretation of the way the Adamic myth depicts evil, i.e. as radical but not ontological, seems to presuppose the notion of an end of evil. Evil is regarded as not definitive, not the first and the last word; it does not ruin the fundamental human possibilities, does not destroy their status as God’s creation. Thus this myth may be in line with representations of an end of evil.

2.3.2. The Three Non-Anthropological Myths of Evil

The other three myths — the tragic myth, that of the drama of creation and of the exiled soul — differ from the Adamic myth in that evil is not depicted as an entirely human affair for which human beings alone are responsible. Therefore, they may be characterised as non-anthropological: not in the sense that they do not refer to human beings but in the sense that evil is not an entirely human affair. 306 Rather, evil is a reality that originates before the creation of human beings, something that is always already there at the moment evil is committed or a power outside of human beings that seduces them into committing evil. When Ricœur interprets the narratives of these myths philosophically, he summarises them as revealing the exteriority of evil. 307 This exteriority may be split into three aspects which the three myths exemplify: the anteriority of evil depicted in the drama of creation, the passiveness and externality of evil depicted in the myth of the exiled soul, and, finally, the notion of its being fated, as expressed in the tragic myth. 308 I will briefly illustrate

305 SdM 399, SE 260. In the final chapter I will discuss this retrospective character of the Adamic symbolism (see Chapter 6, pp. 252ff.).
306 SdM 374, SE 232.
307 Ricœur uses this term “exteriority” as a characteristic of these three myths in an article in The Conflict of Interpretations (“The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I” CdI 290, 291, Col 294, 295). He points out that the same polarity between exteriority and interiority is found in the three symbols of evil: defilement represents the most exteriorised and guilt the most interiorised view of evil.
308 SdM 446, SE 311.
By concentrating on this interpretation of the non-anthropological myths of evil as representing the anteriority, exteriority and fated character of evil, we have in fact already entered the dynamic interpretation in which the myths are read in one another’s light. In Ricœur’s analysis this dynamics is preceded by a more static analysis of the different myths separately. But he also anticipates the “dynamics in the statics” (SdM 445, SE 310). For my purpose of discovering what aspects of the language of avowal this analysis of the myths reveals the dynamics are more important. I will leave the details of the different narratives aside.

According to Ricœur, Greek tragedy is “the sudden and complete manifestation of the essence of the tragic;” all other tragedy is analogous to the Greek tragedy (SdM 355, SE 211).

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311 SdM 357, 361, SE 213, 218.

312 SdM 357, 360, SE 214, 216, 217.

313 SdM 358, SE 214.

314 SdM 359, SE 215.

315 SdM 360, SE 217.

316 SdM 361, SE 218.
outcome. The fulfilment of fate is delayed by the quasi-free hero — but only delayed, not averted. Eventually the gods determine everyone’s fate. It is in the hero’s life that the tragic paradox becomes clear. This paradox consists of the wickedness of the gods determining the fate of human beings on the one hand and the human being’s determination of his own fate on the other. It seems as if the hero causes his own bad fate and is guilty of it, because he has been too proud and immoderate. But, at the same time, the hero is presented as being the plaything and victim of the fate that has been determined for him by the gods. Thus, it is clear that the “fatedness” of evil is indeed prominent in the tragic myth.

But if evil is depicted in the tragic myth as something inevitable, as fate, does it still belong to Ricœur’s category of the myths of the beginning of and end of evil? Is evil not simply “always there” and thus without beginning or end in this myth? Do the three general characteristics of concrete universality, temporal orientation and ontological exploration also apply to the tragic myth? Ricœur does not examine the tragic myth as to these criteria as he does explicitly in the case of the Adamic myth. However, the story of the hero in the tragic myth may be seen as universalising human experiences — although there does seem to be more distance between the hero and the ordinary human being than in the case of the Adamic myth. It can be said that in the courageous acting of the hero the fated character of human life in general is revealed by means of an enlargement. This character becomes visible only gradually; initially there seems to be a tension between freedom and fate. But this tension is in the end resolved in the favour of fate. Is there, then, still a contrast between the fundamental state and the actual state, between primordial innocence and actual evil — the third characteristic of the myths? Is there a totality of meaning with which evil is in tension? It seems that the tragic myth does not fit into this scheme very easily. There is no notion of going “beyond” evil; evil is inevitable, necessary. One cannot conceive of human life without evil. This corresponds with the view that the origin or beginning of evil eventually lies not so much in human action but in the plans of the gods, i.e. in fate. The “ontological exploration” which may be traced in tragedy thus does not take the shape Ricœur gives it in his illustration of this third aspect. There is certainly tension between innocence and guilt, between freedom and fatedness, but not in the
absolute sense of a contrast between the essential goodness and actual evil state of human beings.

If there is no contrast between evil and primordial goodness, there is then no beginning of evil in a radical sense either. And does the tragic myth depict an end of evil? Ricœur discusses this question and concludes that only by having recourse to other types of myths can this end of evil be postulated, which entails leaving the tragic type behind. Real deliverance would involve the wicked god becoming good. The deliverance from evil that occurs within the tragic myth is of a different kind. It is closely related to the form of the spectacle in which the tragic paradox is presented. This spectacle aims to bring about in the spectator feelings and thoughts related to the tragic paradox, finally resulting in pity for the hero by repeating his experience. This pity is the only “deliverance” from evil possible within the tragic myth. It is only possible in the form of the spectacle, acted out in the tragic hero. Ricœur emphasises that the tragic ideas cannot be brought into a coherent theology: “perhaps the tragic theology must be rejected as soon as it is thought.” This theology would involve a very strong form of predestination. Moreover, the idea of the gods as being wicked would imply the “self-destruction of the religious consciousness” because the holiness of the gods is incompatible with it. Thus, in contrast to the Adamic myth, evil is not so much depicted against the background of a totality of meaning or being destined for good. Rather the tragic view itself functions as such a totality. But that means that evil is part of the meaningful whole and not in tension with it. Tragedy aims to give the spectator insight into the character of evil as fated, even though there appears to be freedom of action, responsibility and guilt. One may ask whether it is still meaningful to speak of “evil” in the tragic context. Ricœur does not discuss this aspect. He emphasises that this myth reveals a reverse side of evil: its being fated. I will discuss the possible reappropriation of this side below.

Ricœur calls the myth of the drama of creation also the theogonic myth or myth of chaos. In his analysis of this type of myth Ricœur starts with the Babylonian epos Enuma Elish because it provides a very clear example of this type. It may be characterised as theogonic because it deals

320 SdM 370, SE 228.
321 SdM 364, 369, SE 221, 227.
322 SdM 356, SE 212.
323 SdM 369, SE 226.
324 From this prototype Ricœur moves to other “less pure and more complex forms” (SdM 343, SE 198). First, he shows how this type is in the background of certain themes
primarily with the genesis of the gods. Only secondarily are the coming into existence of the world and the creation of human beings narrated as “the last act of a drama that concerns the generation of the gods.”

This type of myth may also be called myth of chaos, because it tells how in the beginning there was no order, only chaos. In this primordial time the gods were still alone, engaged in constant battle with one another. In this battle gods die and new gods are born. Eventually the world is created and order is established by means of a violent battle. In Enuma Elish the world arises from the dead body of Tiamat who was murdered by Marduk. Subsequently, human beings are created from the blood of rebelling gods who have been vanquished. At the origin of both the world and human beings lies a creative crime. Thus, there is the evil of the primordial chaos and that of the battle in which the chaos is conquered and order established. On the one hand, this creative act means the establishment of order. On the other hand, the primordial evil principle of chaos is always present somewhere in the world. The evil that occurs in the world is seen as a continuation of the primordial evil. Ritual relates the present time to the primordial time by re-enacting the victory of order over chaos.

Ricœur contrasts the drama of creation with the Adamic myth. In the drama of creation evil does not originate in human beings as a break with their good created nature; evil is primordial, “as old as the oldest of beings,” “coextensive with the generation of the divine.”

The evil of primordial chaos is overcome by the establishment of the order of the created world. However, this order is fragile; chaos lurks underneath the order. Evil is thus not a fall taking place in a good creation by the sin of

\[\text{in the Hebrew Bible, e.g. in some enthronement psalms, the figure of the king and in passages that point to the power of the waters or to certain monsters (SE 344, SE 199). Secondly, Ricœur deals with theogonies in Homer and Hesiod. He regards them as changing to a different type of myth by means of the theme of the Titans (SdM 350, SE 206). It would be deviating too far from my central aims to discuss these derivative types as well; I will not go into them further here.}\]

\[\text{SdM 323, 324, SE 176.}\]

\[\text{SdM 327, SE 180.}\]

\[\text{SdM 326, SE 179. Ricœur briefly discusses the question of whether chaos, the battle and murder of gods etc. are also identified as evil by the Babylonian consciousness. He argues that there is no notion of “guilty gods” or something similar in this myth, but that evil is nevertheless mentioned in all these acts of the gods. The gods perform acts which human beings regard as evil (SdM 328, 329, SE 182).}\]

\[\text{Ricœur describes how the Assyro-Babylonian rite concerning the king as an intermediate figure between the gods and human beings relates the present history to the primordial time of the theogonic drama (SdM 336-343, SE 191-198).}\]

\[\text{SdM 326, SE 178; SdM 325, SE 177.}\]
human beings as in the Adamic myth.\footnote{Ricoeur emphasises that one does not find a myth of the fall similar to the biblical one in the Babylonian myths (SdM 329-336, SE 183-191). This confirms his emphasis on the fundamental differences between the Adamic myth and the drama of creation. In his elaboration of the derivative form of the Hebrew king Ricoeur summarises the difference in that the drama of creation cannot contain the following elements which the Adamic myth does incorporate: “the ‘eschatological’ component of salvation, the ‘historical’ component of the human drama, and the ‘anthropological’ component of human evil” (SdM 350, SE 206).} It is already there; it is an “original element of being.”\footnote{Ricoeur mentions this interpretation of the view of evil in the theogonic myth in referring to the “philosophical and learned equivalents of theogony” in the form of “more refined onto-theologies” (SdM 459, 460, SE 327).} This is what Ricoeur means by the aspect of the anteriority of evil: every evil act continues the evil which is already there. Thus, the universalising function of the drama of creation consists precisely in establishing a relation between present and primordial evil; human experience is traced back to the primordial time in which only the gods existed. This also gives temporal orientation to experience: it is placed in a history. However, this history is not one that runs from the beginning of evil towards its end. The end of evil, in the form of the establishment of the order of creation, has already taken place. There is no eschatological perspective of a future end of evil.\footnote{Ricoeur argues that in this type of myth “there is no problem of salvation distinct from the drama of creation; there is no history of salvation distinct from the drama of creation” (SdM 337, SE 191).} On the other hand, the “ontological exploration” that the myth of the drama of creation presents reveals that the evil of human beings is linked to an older evil. The end of evil is thus not radical. Still, the good order of the creation which makes an end to evil may be seen as the totality of meaning with which evil is in tension. This tension is understood as the reappearance of the primordial drama of the evil committed by the gods. Thus, the anteriority of evil is highlighted.

The myth of the exiled soul, finally, is even more remote from the Adamic myth than the drama of creation. It also differs essentially from the other non-anthropological myths of evil, for it is the only myth which divides human beings in a soul and a body and understands the presence of evil by means of this duality.\footnote{SdM 417-420, SE 279-283. The “philosophical” version of this myth can be found in neo-Platonic authors like Damascius and Proclus who use it as a basis for their philosophy.} The myth of the exiled soul is known chiefly by references to it in Platonic and neo-Platonic writings. The original forms of this type of myth are either lost or too strongly influenced by philosophical rationality to be called genuine myths.\footnote{SdM 417-420, SE 279-283.} Nevertheless,
Ricœur thinks there is enough reason to present the idea of a human dualism of body and soul as a specific type of myth. He even speaks of two different forms of this myth: a myth about the dualistic human condition as such and an anthropogonic myth about the origin of this dualism that dates from a later period. These two forms show that a certain development may be discerned in the dualistic myth. The original myth concerned a soul which was already evil and was exiled to the body as a punishment. Nothing is said about how this came to be; but exile implies an original state in which this exile had not yet taken place. In the subsequent form of the development of this scheme the idea arose that this place of exile increases the inclination to do evil. The prison of the body is also the place of seduction and infection with new evil. Thus the exile into the body means an endless repetition of evil. Subsequently, the body becomes associated with the notion of hell. This reinforcement of the negative view of the body also influences the view of the soul, which is increasingly regarded as coming from elsewhere and being of divine origin and immortal.

The later anthropogonic myth also speaks of a dualistic human nature and narrates how this nature came into being. This myth, of which we only have fragments or traits, gives an anthropogony embedded in a theogony. The origin of evil is ascribed to the passion of the god Dionysus. Subsequently, there is the evil of the Titans who murder Dionysus and eat him. They in turn are punished for this with death by being struck by lightning. Human beings are created from the ashes of the Titans, through whom they share in the divine nature of Dionysus, whom the Titans ate, as well as in the evil nature of the Titans. As a result of a primordial criminal act, human beings have a confused nature. Ricœur points out that, apart from the problematic character of this mixed...
nature as such, there is also the problem that human beings forget about their mixed nature, about the difference between body and soul and its primordial origin.345 One may say, that the original myth about the dualistic human nature “called for a myth which would recount the beginning of the confusion that makes necessary a constant effort to regain the vision of duality.”346 The later anthropogenic myth completes the earlier myth by revealing its intention.347

As in the case of the other non-anthropological myths, Ricœur does not determine precisely how the three functions of the myth appear in this myth of the exiled soul. In the later version of the myth they may be, however, easily recognised: it is concerned with human nature in general and its primordial origin. It also seems to universalise experiences of brokenness or a dualistic nature. But, as in the other two non-anthropological myths, the aspect of the temporal orientation towards an end of evil does not, at first glance, seem to be present. Ricœur does deal with the question of whether there is any notion of salvation from evil in the myth of the exiled soul.348 He concludes that the notion of an end of evil is present in this type of myth as well in a special way. This salvation has to do with the becoming aware of the duality in oneself. By recognising the evil, covetous character of the body one may escape from its power. Perhaps one may recognise in the divine sphere, with which the soul is associated, the characteristic of the totality of meaning with which the experience of evil is in tension. This tension is explained in the later myth by the primordial history of Dionysus and the Titans. Like the myth of the drama of creation, this aspect of the story dealing with the battle and crimes of the gods sees evil as predating human existence. Apart from this aspect of anteriority however, Ricœur also regards this myth as representing the aspect of the exteriority of the seduction to evil.349 In comparison with the myth of the drama of creation, it seems that this myth emphasises the moment of personal choice more, but this in tension with the moment of anteriority. Thus Ricœur can summarise the view of the myth of the exiled soul as “evil that is both committed and undergone.”350 This evil which is both choice and fate, both human and divine, is represented by the ambiguous border figure of the Titan: “he attests that the

345 SdM 418, 434, SE 280, 298.
346 SdM 434, SE 298.
347 SdM 436, SE 300.
348 SdM 436-440, SE 300-305.
349 SdM 463, SE 331.
350 SdM 435, SE 299.
lowest degree of freedom is close to the brute angry, inordinate force of
the unleashed elements.” In the original myth the association of evil
with the body is more prominent. This symbol of the body seems the
clearest representation of the externality of evil, and thus also the clearest
point of difference with the other myths. As the body may symbolically
stand for the involuntary, for “that which happens in me without my
doing,” it seems clearly to reveal the experience of the externality of evil,
i.e. the seduction to evil which simply happens without my willing.
The myth of the exiled soul makes human beings aware of this possi-
bility of being seduced by something in themselves. Thus evil is not only
something already there, but also something for which human beings are
responsible. Still, as the confused nature of human beings is their fate as
well, the inevitability of evil also has a place here.

2.3.3. The Cycle of Myths

My approach to the non-anthropological myths via the aspects of evil
being fated, its anteriority and externality was already supplied by
Ricœur’s dynamic interpretation. As I indicated above, it is this dynamic
interpretation at which Ricœur’s analysis of the myths of evil aims.
The dynamics is nourished by the relation of differences and similarities
between the different myths. This is what is meant by the expression “the
cycle of myths:” a “gravitational space” of “concentric structure, which
puts the tragic myth nearest to the Adamic myth and the myth of the
exiled soul farthest from it.” Above I emphasised the differences
between especially the anthropological myth and the three non-anthro-
pological ones. They seem mutually exclusive. However, precisely at
the moment these differences have come to light it may be possible to show
their similarities. This quest for similarities is also a quest for a reappropri-
ation of the elements of the myths that at first glance seem to be remote
from our view of evil. In Ricœur’s view, the Adamic myth with its ethical
emphasis on the human responsibility for evil, on evil as a conscious act,
is closest to our experience of evil. His choice of the Adamic myth as a
“pre-eminently” perspective may also be explained on the basis of this
conviction. The non-anthropological myths are more remote from us than
the Adamic one — just as the symbol of defilement is more remote than

351 SdM 435, SE 299.
352 SdM 464, SE 332.
353 SdM 444, 445, SE 310.
that of sin and guilt.\textsuperscript{354} The idea of the exteriority of evil, which the three non-anthropological myths represent, is more difficult for us to understand and appropriate. However, these myths also reveal that there is a reverse side to an ethical view of evil.\textsuperscript{355} They indicate the limits of an ethical view by revealing aspects which a purely ethical view cannot take into account. Ricœur investigates whether these aspects cannot, in a later stage of the interpretation, also be seen as an integral part of the experience of evil. By means of the dynamic interpretation of the cycle of myths, this ambiguity of perspectives may be revealed and appropriated. Ricœur attempts this appropriation or re-enactment of the reverse side via the Adamic myth, i.e. by trying to find out the relations — differences and similarities — between the Adamic myth and the others. In this dynamic interpretation Ricœur also discovers new perspectives within the Adamic myth itself. These perspectives are discovered because the other non-anthropological myths make us aware of these aspects, put them more in relief. This dynamic approach is at the same time a justification of the pre-eminence of the Adamic myth: if this dynamic, this cycle, can truly be put into motion from the perspective of the Adamic myth, the value of this myth is affirmed. Ricœur thus seems to look for a broad view of evil which may incorporate different, ambiguous perspectives; he wagers that the Adamic myth may offer this view. Let us follow his account of the cycle of myths.

What kind of affinities or similarities with the other myths does the Adamic myth display? There are some elements in the Adamic myth, upon which we have touched only briefly, that distract one’s attention from the central idea that human beings bring evil into the world by eating the forbidden fruit. Ricœur describes these elements as causing a kind of dizziness in the story.\textsuperscript{356} They slow down the evil action and relate how human beings came to performing this action. First, they do not eat the fruit of their own accord; they are seduced by the serpent. Moreover, Eve is seduced first and then Adam. On the one hand, these elements in the story spin out the evil decision to eat the forbidden fruit. On the other hand, as a result of these elements, responsibility for the evil action becomes more vague: it is spread over several figures. What is more, the serpent takes the initiative in the act. He creates doubt and distrust in the paradisiacal setting.

\textsuperscript{354} E.g. “the most archaic and apparently most outmoded vision of the world, the vision of theogony” (SdM 445, SE 310).
\textsuperscript{355} SdM 447, 460, SE 313, 328.
\textsuperscript{356} SdM 392, SE 252.
where there was only self-evident trust in the good order of things. By asking, “Has God said that Ye shall not eat of every tree? …ye shall be as gods …,” he causes a desire for more than what is there, for knowledge of good and evil, for being like God. What had at first been a human limit is now turned into an interdiction; the possibility of transgressing the interdiction comes into view. These elements and especially that of the serpent contrast with the main lines in this myth. The transition from innocence to guilt, referred to above is thus less absolute: in the figure of the serpent evil is already there in the Garden of Eden and the human beings are presented as being seduced by something outside themselves. Ricœur interprets these elements as representing the reverse side of the ethical view of evil. The fact that this reverse side appears also within the most ethical of the four myths — the Adamic myth itself — may be regarded as an indication that this aspect cannot easily be left out when dealing with evil. This may be a sign that the notion of the exteriority of evil is not as remote from us as we may at first think. Thus, by discovering these contrasting elements in the Adamic myth itself, a first step is taken in the direction of reappropriation.

Ricœur distinguishes three experiences that inspire the image of the serpent. These experiences turn out to correspond, as we will see, with aspects of the exteriority of evil that we know from the non-anthropological myths. First of all, the serpent can be seen as expressing the experience of “quasi-externality” of evil. At one and the same time evil is both something within us and something other than us, something strange. These feelings of estrangement from ourselves that accompany experiences of evil may be projected onto an object outside ourselves, and part of the responsibility is passed onto this object as well. Ricœur’s language in this interpretation reminds us of the concept he used to summarise the symbols of evil: the servile will. This concept also concerns the experience of an external enslavement which is at the same time something one does to oneself. The will that binds itself, also expressed in the concept of the servile will, is here projected onto an object which is indicted. It is the experience of passivity in the evil act that alienates us from ourselves and makes us blame something else for it. These experiences remind us of the aspects of externality and passivity which Ricœur discovered in the myth of the exiled soul, in which all the bad

357 Genesis 3: 1, 5 (King James Version).
358 SdM 393, 394, SE 253, 254. See also note 299 above.
359 SdM 395-398, SE 256-259.
360 SdM 395, 396, SE 256, 257.
361 SdM 303-305, SE 154-156, see also pp. 63, 64 above; SdM 397, SE 257.
desires are projected onto the body that imprisons the soul. Moreover, both in the Adamic myth and in the myth of the exiled soul the theme of banishment to the body and to the world outside Eden respectively figures. Thus, the theme of exile is attached to the theme of the fall as a “curse.” Moreover, in other biblical texts, such as the prophets and the psalms, the body also figures symbolically as expression of the externality of evil. The Pauline associations of sin with the body and the flesh prepared the way for a very close proximity of the two myths in neo-Platonic writings. By showing these similarities between biblical and Greek representations of evil Ricœur tries to bridge the initial strangeness of the idea of evil as an external power which seduces. It is clear that he regards this idea as a fundamental part of the experience of evil, which we are still able to recognise. Thus, reappropriation of elements from the myth of the exiled soul may succeed, even though it is the farthest from the Adamic myth.

Still, Ricœur wants to go further than this psychological interpretation of the figure of the serpent. He argues that the serpent also expresses the experience of the externality of evil in a more ontological sense. The serpent is not smoothly introduced in the story: he suddenly appears. Ricœur relates this to the experience that evil is something that is always already there, something that human beings continue, something in which they participate. This reminds us especially of his interpretation of the myth of the drama of creation as depicting the anteriority of evil. But we do not find references to this myth in Ricœur’s analysis. Rather, he indicates the element of the anteriority of evil as tragic. In the light of the tragic myth the serpent appears as the “Adversary” who seduces the blinded heroes of the first human beings. This expresses, in Ricœur’s view, the anterior, “inhuman” character of evil in which human beings participate when they commit evil. The term “tragic” thus receives a very broad meaning in this context.

362 SdM 464, SE 331.
363 SdM 464, SE 332.
365 SdM 468–474, SE 337-344.
366 SdM 397, SE 257, 258.
367 We find these remarks in the context of his reflections on the relation between the Adamic and the tragic myth. Here he argues for example: “We have already hinted at the ‘tragic’ meaning of the figure of the serpent, which is already there and already evil” (SdM 445, SE 311).
368 SdM 447, SE 313.
369 SdM 448, SE 314.
Finally, Ricœur identifies a third and even more radical aspect of externality in the serpent, i.e. its representation of the powers of chaos. Ricœur has in mind experiences of the absurdity of the world, of “a side of the world that confronts us as chaos and that is symbolised by the chthonic animal.” Ricœur again refers to tragedy in relation to this third aspect — although it seems to remind us of the drama of creation as well, in which evil is interpreted as the resurging primordial chaos. Thus, it seems that the tragic myth that is also closest to the Adamic myth incorporates, in Ricœur’s view, several, if not all, elements of exteriority that are found in the other two non-anthropological myths. I will link up with this broader notion of the tragic in my vocabulary below. As regards the serpent, it is clear that Ricœur sees it as symbolising the anteriority of evil in a general and more cosmic sense. As such, it relates to experiences of evil as seducing power, as something already there, as ineluctable, as chaos.

Let us return to that broad notion of the tragic which includes several aspects of the exteriority of evil. Ricœur finds these aspects symbolised not just in the figure of the serpent but also in that of Adamic figure — perhaps one should say “figures” — itself. This figure is ambiguous. It not only thematises full human responsibility but also “a mystery of iniquity which is not reducible to the clear consciousness of actual evil, of the evil beginning in the instant.” The Adamic figure points to an “underlying peccability,” which is the “horizon of actual evil.” Later on, in the stage of speculation, this radical element of evil is expressed by means of the notion of inheritance in the concept of original sin. The Adamic figure expresses how this reverse side of the ethical experience is at the same time part of it, how it is implied in the experience of freedom. The “fateful aspects” are “necessarily experienced as fault” and not just as fate. “It is I who raise up the Ineluctable, within myself and outside myself,” Ricœur argues. Thus, traces of a tragic view of evil may be shown in the Adamic myth. The discovery of these aspects contributes to Ricœur’s effort to reappropriate the tragic view.

He undertakes this reappropriation of the tragic myth also via another route than that of the Adamic myth — via suffered evil. Suffering,
especially suffering for which there seems to be no justification, also puts the ethical view of evil under pressure. When human suffering cannot be viewed as self-caused, as in the case of Job, this experience entails a view of both human beings and God that differs from the ethical one. For in this case God can no longer be seen as rightfully punishing human beings with suffering. And human beings can no longer be regarded as wholly guilty. Thus, the attitude towards God may become a mixture of respect for and terror at the incomprehensibility and mysteriousness of God. This attitude differs from the ethical one as based on the idea of God as a righteous judge and merciful Lord; now God could be the enemy of the human beings. On the other hand, the abundance of suffering brings with it a different view of the human being. The sufferer is someone to approach with compassion, not with accusations. Thus, both the experience of being guilty of an evil one has not chosen and that of the meaninglessness of suffering may call forth a tragic view of evil. Still, Ricœur emphasises that this tragic view can never be stated in a theoretical form but only depicted, as in the Greek tragedies and in the story of Job.

With this reappropriation of the tragic myth we have passed through the whole cycle of myths. Can we conclude that Ricœur has succeeded in his attempt at reappropriation by means of a dynamic interpretation? Ricœur states explicitly at the end of this interpretation that he does not want to claim this. That is mainly because his investigation is still incomplete: so far he has only undertaken a "hermeneutics of myths" and not yet a "systematic philosophy." The hermeneutical analysis must be completed with a real philosophical investigation into evil. However, as has become clear in the above Ricœur has already given many impulses to such a philosophical consideration. In my view, the hermeneutical and philosophical stages cannot be so neatly distinguished in The Symbolism of Evil. That a more philosophical line is already present in this book may be illustrated by the paragraph with which Ricœur ends his analysis of the myths of evil and which I quote here in its entirety.

One thing that we have acquired, at the end of our exercise in hermeneutics, is a conviction that the three myths of chaos, of divine blinding, and of exile, reveal the hyper-ethical dimension of the myth of the fall and so indicate the limitations of any "philosophy of the will" which tries to remain an ethical vision of the world. The myth of the fall needs those other myths,

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377 SdM448, SE 314.
378 The translation of the French expression "l'inachèvement même de l'entreprise" by the English "the failure of our undertaking" does not seem very precise; I prefer the term "incompleteness" to "failure" (SdM 476, SE 345, 346).
so that the ethical God it presupposes may continue to be a Deus Absconditus and so that the guilty human beings it denounces may also appear as the victims of iniquity which make them deserving of Pity as well as of Wrath. 379

These conclusions remind us of Ricœur’s remarks in the combined introduction to both Fallible Man and The Symbolism of Evil, where he states that he could have chosen “Grandeur and Limitation of an Ethical Vision of the World” as the subtitle for this double volume. 380 The limitation of the ethical view would lie, he argues, in its inability to express the “victim-side” of freedom, i.e. that evil is also giving in to an adversary and being a victim of its siege. 381 Via the hermeneutical analysis of the religious confession of evil Ricœur tries to get to an ambiguous understanding of evil in which the victim-side contrasts with the “doer-side.” This “philosophical agenda” of the hermeneutical analysis is clearly visible in The Symbolism of Evil. This book may indeed be regarded as showing the grandeur and limitation of the ethical view of evil in the analysis of the pre-eminence of the ethical Adamic myth, as well as its reverse side represented by the other myths. Ricœur’s attempt at reappropriation may be regarded as a success to this extent.

By way of conclusion to this section on the mythical expressions of evil I will indicate the “grandeur and limitation” of the ethical view that Ricœur reveals in his analysis of the myths. By taking into account the non-anthropological myths and relating them to the Adamic myth, Ricœur shows that the ethical view of evil with its emphasis on freedom and human responsibility has a reverse side: the exteriority of evil. This exteriority cannot be incorporated into the ethical view: one needs a different sensitivity to notice it and a different language to express it. Here lies the limitation of the ethical view. However, Ricœur emphasises several times that the reverse side can only be acknowledged after the confession of our responsibility for the evil committed:

We must not grow weary of repeating that only he who confesses that he is the author of evil discovers the reverse of that confession, namely the non-posed in the positing of evil, the always already there of evil, the other of temptation, and finally the incomprehensibility of God, who tests me and who can appear to me as my enemy. 382

The discovery of evil as non-posed is secondary; the grandeur of the ethical view has to be discovered first. Ricœur reveals this grandeur in

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379 SdM 477, SE 346.
380 HF 14, FM xlv, xlvi.
381 HF 17, FM xlix.
382 SdM 457, SE 324.
his analysis of the Adamic myth itself. As we have seen, the three functions of the myth apply most to the Adamic myth. This is the only one of the four in which the discordance between the fundamental modality and the actual reality of human beings is narrated. It thus displays a hopeful anthropology of ambiguity. This anthropology is closely connected to the other characteristics of universalisation and temporal orientation: evil is depicted as beginning with a first act by human beings. Thus, insofar as the Adamic myth is truly ethical it depicts the transition from innocence to guilt. It does not display the one-sidedness that Ricœur feared in ethical views: that they arrive too late, i.e. after the fall. Although it is truly ethical in that it depicts evil as a sin for which human beings are responsible, it also takes into account the contingent character of this evil: thus it makes room for the hopeful view that is so important for Ricœur. It is this ethical picture that is corrected by the non-anthropological myths. These myths reveal a different view of evil. When this view is also discovered in the Adamic myth, it is clear that this myth is more ambiguous than the analysis of the ethical line showed. But Ricœur appreciates the Adamic myth especially for this ambiguity. According to Ricœur, it is important that one never lose sight of this reverse side, so that the ethical view never becomes a “platitude.” Thus, Ricœur seems to win his wager that the Adamic myth offers a broad view of evil which incorporates different, ambiguous perspectives.

Ricœur’s appreciation of the Adamic myth is in line with his affinity for the symbolism of sin and its conceptual expression in the notion of the servile will. This notion was also characterised by an ambiguity: “servitude” and “willing” stand for two different views of evil that cannot be expressed in the language of the other. Ricœur’s very explicit appreciation of the Adamic myth thus confirms retroactively our observation of preferences in his analysis of the symbols. Whereas Ricœur’s preference for an ambiguous view of evil is thus further clarified in the analysis of the myths, we do not really gain further insight into its precise relation with the modality of “before God.” We find remarks on the views of God that correspond to the ethical and the hyper-ethical views of evil. But again, the religious character of the myth is mostly taken for granted and not investigated as a separate issue. The question as to why an ambiguous view of evil may arise especially — or perhaps only — in a religious context remains unanswered. The issue will
accompany us in the rest of our study. But before we are able to turn to the other authors we must take up the question of how precisely Ricœur’s hermeneutical analysis can be continued in a philosophical investigation.

2.4. From the Symbols to Philosophy

In Ricœur’s view, evil is a particularly tricky subject for philosophy. In a later article he calls it a challenge. The crucial point is how philosophy accepts this challenge: as “an invitation to think less about the problem, or a provocation to think more, or to think differently about it?” These alternatives are not of equal value. Rather, the options of “thinking less” and “thinking more” involve certain risks, i.e. of thinking too little or too much. The problem of evil may be regarded as something so obscure and, in particular, so terrible that speaking, thinking, interpreting or reflecting do not seem appropriate. The only “adequate” reaction seems to be silent and acknowledge the enigma of evil. These approaches, based on an attitude of “thinking less,” seem to run the risk of passively avoiding a confrontation with evil. “Thinking more,” on the other hand, seems to involve the risk of pretending to explain or comprehend evil fully, whether in psychological or biological explanations or in the form of a theodicy. I indicated above that the problematic character of evil as a subject of philosophy lies in its absurdity. It is difficult for reflection to take into account the absurdity that that which is ontologically good — i.e. the fundamental structures of human willing — in fact turns out to be evil. Reflection runs the risk of explaining away this absurd character or of turning what is absurd into something necessary — both examples of “thinking more.” Or, in the case of “thinking less,” the absurdity may be left as it is, because any clarification is believed to be impossible.

Ricœur’s approach to evil via the symbolic expressions of the avowal of evil may be characterised as an attempt to “think differently” and thus to avoid the risks of thinking more or less. Now that we have made the

386 “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” FrS 249-261; Le Mal op. cit.
387 Paul Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” FrS 249; Le Mal, op. cit. 13.
389 See p. 31 above.
detour via the symbols and myths of evil and have arrived at the point where we must move on from the “re-enactment of the religious consciousness of fault” to the “philosophy of fault” we must return to this problematic relation between philosophical reflection and the theme of evil. Does the approach to evil via the symbols really mean a way out of this impasse? For an answer to this question it is only to some extent helpful to consult Ricoeur’s work: Ricoeur did not complete his original project of developing a philosophy of fault which builds on the hermeneutical analysis of the symbols.\textsuperscript{390} Still, the analysis of the symbols sheds light on the problematic relation between reflection and the theme of evil. The problem it reveals is more specific than that of taking into account the absurd character of evil. Ricoeur’s route of “thinking differently” is a reflection that starts from what the symbolic, pre-philosophical expressions yield. Symbolism turns out to be indispensable in thinking and speaking about evil. But precisely this symbolic character is problematic for speculative reflection. In the first stages of the cycle of expressions of evil, i.e. that of the symbols and myths, this symbolism crops up more or less spontaneously. But in speculation there are tendencies that oppose this symbolism, such as the desire for clarity, for univocality, for knowledge. The “excess of meaning” which characterises the symbols and myths is difficult to preserve at the level of speculation.\textsuperscript{391} And the ambiguous view of evil is offensive: regarding the concept of the servile will Ricoeur remarked that this view is insupportable for thought when it is expressed in direct, unambiguous language.\textsuperscript{392}

In Ricoeur’s texts the recurring example of these tendencies in speculation that conflict with the symbolic character of expressions of evil is the concept of original sin.\textsuperscript{393} This concept has a rational appearance, according to Ricoeur, and has often been interpreted as a rational concept. It combines “two heterogeneous notions of a biological transmission through generation and an individual imputation of guilt.”\textsuperscript{394} But, Ricoeur argues, “nothing is more deceptive than its appearance of rationality.”\textsuperscript{395} Beneath its rational appearance its symbolic character must be disclosed.

\textsuperscript{390} See p. 35 above.
\textsuperscript{391} “Original Sin: ‘A Study in Meaning’” Cdl 277, Col 281.
\textsuperscript{392} See p. 63 above.
\textsuperscript{393} In \textit{The Symbolism of Evil} one finds scattered remarks on “original sin;” the theme is further explored and presented separately in the article “‘Original Sin: ‘A Study in Meaning’” (Cdl 265-282, Col 269-286).
\textsuperscript{394} Paul Ricoeur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” FtS 254; \textit{Le Mal}, op. cit., 25.
\textsuperscript{395} SdM 168, SE 4.
The concept of original sin is a rational symbol that can only be comprehended as the tertiary expression in the circle of expressions of evil, i.e. as building on the symbols and myths. It is also an expression of the confession of evil. The ambiguous view of evil which the analysis of the symbols and myths discloses is also found in this speculative concept. Original sin corresponds with the concept of the servile will as well as with the Adamic myth. It also unites the view of evil as something we consciously commit and for which we are fully responsible with the view of evil as already there, outside ourselves as a seductive power. However, the danger is that one misinterprets this notion of original sin and mistakes it for “knowledge.” Ricœur aims to unmask the concept of original sin as false knowledge and at the same time to recover its symbolic meaning. This means that his “thinking differently” contains both a positive and a negative aspect: the discovery of the symbolic expressions of the ambiguity of evil unmasks unambiguous expressions as false knowledge. Thus, the hermeneutical analysis of the symbolic expressions of evil reveals the specific problem of reflection in taking the ambiguous nature of evil into account. It deepens the understanding of the problematic relation between philosophy and evil and thus gives more substance to my initial distrust of speculative approaches with respect to evil.

I have now presented the discovery of the ambiguity of evil as a specification of the problem of a philosophical approach to evil; the absurdity of evil, on the other hand, was the more general problem. This is, indeed, my view of the relation between these two designations of the problem of evil. The absurdity refers to the problem that that which is ontologically good is actually evil. Evil is not necessary, but on the other hand it appears to be anything but uncommon. The ambiguity of evil refers to the fact that evil is viewed both as radical and contingent, as inevitable and a conscious act, as always already there and beginning in the instant. Although this problem is more specific, it can be understood only against the background of the more general problem of the absurdity. The ethical view of evil, which reveals evil as a contingent, conscious act of human beings for which they are fully responsible, must be understood in the sense that

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396 E.g. SdM 173, SE 9; “‘Original Sin:’ A Study in Meaning” Cdl 266, 277, Col 270, 281.
397 “‘Original Sin:’ A Study in Meaning” Cdl 266, Col 270.
398 “‘Original Sin:’ A Study in Meaning” Cdl 266, Col 270. Cf. SdM 168, SE 4: “Finally and above all, this rationalisation …, belongs to a period of thought marked by gnostic pretensions to ‘know’ the mysteries of God and human destiny.”
nothing in the human fundamental structures compels humans to such an act. Evil is not an ontological category. A specific anthropology lies behind this ethical view; it is a view of human beings which is characterised by hope. Thus the view of evil as absurd also entails a limitation of the radical and inevitable side of evil. This side can only be taken into account after the ethical recognition of evil as one’s fault: it is the reverse side of evil. The radical nature of evil can never be asserted as such, independently of the ethical side. In this way, the absurd character of evil determines, as its background, the account of the ambiguity of evil as well.

Was it not possible to assert all these things concerning the absurdity and ambiguity of evil etc. without this elaborate account of Ricœur’s analysis of the symbols and myths of evil? Would it not have been clearer and more to the point if I had just presented the outcome of Ricœur’s hermeneutical analysis? Perhaps it would have been clearer, but we would not have gained much by this clarity. It would have been a clarity poor in meaning and substance; it would have been like the concept of the “servile will” lacking the symbols on which it is based. The movement of reappropriation of the symbols and myths is, as such, important and valuable. It reveals different aspects of evil in their symbolic mode of expression; they cannot be translated, as Ricœur emphasises repeatedly. Moreover, this reappropriation is necessary because the language of evil is no longer completely familiar to us. We need to learn it again and re-enact the experiences they express. I agree on this point with Ricœur’s view of our time as one of “forgetfulness and restoration.” That is why I argue for a regauging of the theme of evil. This regauging cannot be performed merely by mentioning that to which the analysis of the symbols leads, its outcome. Moreover, it is very difficult to summarise the result of the analysis. The analysis as such, i.e. as a whole and not a short conclusion at the end, is the outcome. This means that any reflection on evil starting from the symbols is not simply drawing some conclusions from the analysis and building on them. The more general, summarising terms I used above like “absurdity,” “ambiguity,” “ethical,” etc. can be understood only on the basis of the analysis of the symbols themselves. Thus, the hermeneutics of the symbolic expressions of evil is a full and essential part of philosophical reflection on evil.

But if the hermeneutical analysis of the symbols is indispensable to a philosophy of evil, and if it also contains, as I argued, so many impulses for philosophy, is it as such not enough for a project of regauging the
theme of evil? Is this project not already completed after the investigation into Ricœur’s approach to evil? My investigation of Ricœur was guided by questions and suggestions that are not Ricœur’s — although they are rooted in his thinking. This means that I did not simply follow Ricœur’s analysis; I investigated it also with a view to answering my own questions. This means that at several points I went further than Ricœur. For example, I focused on recurring characteristics in the symbols and myths and thus discovered certain threads. The thread of ambiguity is, of course, the most important one. By emphasising this aspect I also go further than Ricœur, as he does not highlight it in the way I do. But I think I gave enough foundations for this interpretation in Ricœur’s work. In the following chapters this aspect will remain an important interpretative tool for understanding reflection on evil. In order to avoid elaborate formulations of the two views to which this notion of ambiguity refers I introduce the two designations “ethical” and “tragic.” The term “ethical” was already used above quite often to indicate the approach to evil in terms of freedom and responsibility. Ricœur’s hopeful anthropology was discovered as giving further shape to it. The term “tragic” was, of course, most prominent in relation to the tragic myth. However, from now on, I will use it to indicate all aspects of evil that belong to what was called “the reverse side” of the ethical view: i.e. the exteriority of evil which may be further characterised as its anteriority, its fateful character, and externality. By using the term “tragic” to indicate all these aspects I follow examples in Ricœur’s discussion.  

The questions that guided and focused my investigation of Ricœur have not yet been answered fully. This is the reason why the project of regauging must continue after this hermeneutical stage. I will mention the most important issues. First the notion of the ambiguity of evil needs further attention. Do we find this ambiguity in Kant’s ethical approach and Jaspers’ tragic view? And, if not, what does this reveal regarding the value of their reflection? Ricœur argues in favour of a broad notion of evil in which different views can be taken into account. Do we, using the tool of ambiguity in our analysis of other authors discover a one-sidedness in

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400 E.g. Ricœur’s broad notion of the “tragic” indicated above pp. 85, 86. Cf. also Ricœur’s use of the term “tragic” in a later article where he designates the Gnostic view of evil with this term as opposed to Augustine’s view of evil. He summarises this Gnostic view in the French text as the view in which all forms of evil are included in an evil principle; the revised English text does not have this remark (“Evil, a challenge to Philosophy and Theology” FtS 253; Le Mal, op. cit., 23).
their approaches? And what may be the problem with such a one-sided approach? Is Ricœur’s broad view of evil in a sense normative because it is broader, or can other, narrower views also be valuable? Another important point to investigate further is that of the religious character of Ricœur’s view of evil. Do the absurdity and the ambiguity of evil come to light only “before God,” in the act of confession? This point receives little separate attention in Ricœur’s analysis, as we have seen. Thus, we will explore it further when dealing with the other thinkers and also in relation to the notion of the end of evil in the final chapter. Dealing with all these questions contributes to our search for the context in which the language of evil is “at home.” Finally, the question of the difficult relation between reflection and the theme of evil remains the object of attention. Ricœur’s approach implies a clear opinion on this problem and in the following this view will be tested in dealing with the speculative reflections of Kant, Jaspers and Barth. The way we use Ricœur’s thinking in dealing with the other authors thus also means critically reviewing Ricœur’s approach. His thought will function as the starting point but not as an absolute criterion — and a thought provoking starting point it is indeed.
CHAPTER 3

KANT'S RADICAL EVIL: AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO EVIL

In 1793, after the publication of his three Critiques, Immanuel Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* appeared. This investigation into rational religion opens directly, and without elaborate explanation, with a treatise concerning the “radical evil in human nature.” This treatise on radical evil is the first extended investigation of the theme of evil in Kant’s work. It seems to be an example of what Ricoeur designates a speculative account of evil, as distinct from the expressions of evil in symbols and myths. The brief introductory remarks concerning the aim of Religion already illustrate this speculative character. Kant characterises his investigation into religion as a project of the philosopher. The philosopher is “purely a teacher of reason (from mere principles a priori)” and, in investigating religion, the philosopher is only competent to deal with the “pure religion of reason.” Revelation, or historical religion, lies outside his competence — it is the field of biblical theology. However, it may be possible to investigate this revelation philosophically: Kant’s aim is to find out whether a “pure rational system of religion” may be discovered in the historical religion. Very briefly Kant indicates what may be called his method to accomplish this:

> to start from some alleged revelation or other, and ... to hold fragments of this revelation, as a historical system, up to moral concepts, and see whether it does not lead back to the same pure rational system of religion.

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2 This essay first appeared as a separate essay in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1792.

3 RiG 12, RwL 64.

4 RiG 12, RwL 64. The phrase “to hold fragments of this revelation, as a historical system, up to moral concepts,” is a translation of the German: “... die Offenbarung als historisches System an moralische Begriffe bloß fragmentarisch halten ....”
With a backward glance at Ricœur’s ideas, a speculative investigation that considers rationality to be of paramount importance seems risky where the theme of evil is concerned. Is it able to take the absurd character of evil into account? In Ricœur’s analysis this risk turned out to relate specifically to what I called the ambiguity of evil, i.e. that there are several different aspects of evil, which leads to conflicting views when we think and speak about it. The most important views of evil were labelled “ethical” and “tragic.” In order to investigate this ambiguity further in relation to speculation I will thus turn to Kant and Jaspers as exponents, respectively, of the ethical and tragic views. This classification suggests that they favour one of the possible views of evil, which also implies that they deny or ignore other views. If it is indeed important to recognise the ambiguity of evil, Kant and Jaspers can be accused of one-sidedness. In the chapters dealing with Kant and Jaspers I will examine whether this is the case. On the other hand, my emphasis on the ambiguity of evil — which I am borrowing from Ricœur — may also nourish a different awareness, i.e. that of a “reverse side” that contrasts with the main lines of their thinking. Just as a reverse side was discovered in the ethical Adamic myth, one may become aware of other elements in approaches that, at first glance, seem to be fully ethical or tragic. Still, this notion of ambiguity is not the only focus of this analysis of Kant’s view of evil. It functions only as a key or tool by means of which I hope to gain insight into the approaches to evil found in Kant and Jaspers. My general aim remains a regauging of the theme of evil in order to discover its value for reflection on human beings and the world. This implies a search for the context in which the language of evil is at home and most elaborated. In this chapter I deal with these questions in relation to Kant’s famous investigation into radical evil. Below I will first introduce Kant as an ethical thinker on evil and further explain my reasons for dealing with his views. Subsequently I will explore Kant’s view of evil in both the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. I will explain the reasons for this approach below. In the last section I will evaluate Kant’s view in relation to the main questions and draw conclusions regarding my general questions.

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3.1. The Characterisation of Kant’s View of Evil as “Ethical”

What are the reasons to deal with Kant’s approach to evil as an exponent of an ethical view of evil? First of all, this classification is motivated by the way Kant introduces his investigation into religion — of which the essay on radical evil is the first part. I have just cited Kant’s remarks concerning the aim of Religion, i.e. to hold fragments of revelation up to moral concepts in order to find a rational religion. From this formulation one may already conclude that moral concepts play a vital role in discovering rational religion. It is true that for Kant, where religion is concerned, rationality is almost equivalent with morality. Religion is rational not in the sense of theoretical reason but insofar as it belongs to the area of practical reason. This is the domain of human willing and acting. That this domain is not beyond reason is shown by the fact that an objective moral law can be formulated that holds for all rational beings. This law defines morally correct behaviour objectively. Only in relation to this practical sphere of moral willing and acting can religion be called rational, for, in relation to the moral law, the religious ideas of God and immortality “can and must be assumed, although we cannot theoretically cognise and have insight into them.”6 Theoretically, i.e. in the domain of pure reason, these religious ideas are only a problematic possibility which cannot be accepted as knowledge. However, in order that the moral law may determine the will — i.e. for the practical use of reason — these ideas must be postulated. To that extent they may also be called rational. When Kant speaks, therefore, of the pure religion of reason, he means a religion that follows from the principles of practical reason, i.e. from morality.

This relation between morality and religion was already established in the Critique of Practical Reason. In the prefaces to the first and second edition of Religion Kant goes back to this ethical theory of the second Critique. With a flair for rhetoric Kant explains the relation between morality and religion by means of two seemingly contradictory remarks. He states first that “on its own behalf morality in no way needs religion …”7 and ends by saying: “Morality thus inevitably leads to religion.”8 In the text between these remarks Kant recapitulates the connection between morality and religion as it was established in the second Critique. On its own behalf morality needs no end in order to recognise what

6 KpV 5, CpR 140.
7 RiG 3, RwL 57.
8 RiG 7, RwL 59.
duty is. The moral law itself is a sufficient ground to determine the will. Yet it is “one of the inescapable limitations of human beings” that they are also concerned about the question: “what is then the result of this right conduct of ours?”<sup>9</sup> They also want to think there is some result or end to their lawful actions. When it comes to the consequences of our acting, religious ideas have to be assumed. This transition to the sphere of religion goes via the notion of the highest good. This notion has to be accepted as the ultimate consequence or end of morality. Kant reminds his readers that the idea of the highest good can be true only if an omnipotent moral being is postulated who accomplishes it; for human beings are not able to do this. Thus, the postulate of God follows from the moral law. In this sense one must say that morality leads inevitably to religion.<sup>10</sup> These are all claims that were also made in the second *Critique*.<sup>11</sup> Thus Kant introduces his study of religion by reminding the reader that religion is the superstructure of morality. This is the main reason for calling the framework within which Kant deals with religion — and thus also with radical evil — ethical. Below we will find out how this framework functions in the rest of *Religion*.

However, already at first glance the notion of a radical evil in human nature does not seem to fit into this ethical framework, for the characterisation “radical” seems associated with inevitability, and completeness. How can evil that is inevitable and total be related to evil as a free act?<sup>12</sup> The adjective “radical” suggests a view of evil that is opposed to the ethical and akin to its reverse side, i.e. the tragic view. In Ricoeur’s analysis of the Adamic myth we came across this notion of the radicalness of evil as the counterpart of its contingency.<sup>13</sup> The explanation of the term “radical” Kant gives seems to be in line with these suggestions. The first time the term appears — apart from the title — it stands directly next to the term “innate,” which suggests a parallel meaning. The two terms characterise the propensity in human beings to evil.<sup>14</sup> A few pages further Kant gives a more precise explanation of the term “radical:”

This evil is *radical*, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims; as natural propensity, it is also not to be *extirpated* through human forces, for this

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<sup>9</sup> RiG 7n, 5, RwL 60n, 58.
<sup>10</sup> RiG 6, 7, RwL 59, 60.
<sup>11</sup> For an exact parallel to the last claim see KpV 129, CpR 243, 244.
<sup>12</sup> By the term “act” I indicate both mental acts of the will and practical or physical acts.
<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 2, p. 73.
<sup>14</sup> RiG 32, RwL 80.
could only happen through good maxims — something that cannot take place if the subjective ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted.15

What does this idea of a radical evil do in an ethical context? Does it not fundamentally contradict the possibility of free, responsible acting that is the foundation of any ethical system? It seems that the idea of radical evil as such places the ethical system under pressure. Moreover, the notion of radical evil does not appear in Kant's work before Religion. Not surprisingly then, the question of whether this notion is a foreign element in Kant's thinking became a contentious issue in the reception of Kant's philosophy.16 Thus we find, on the one hand, a strong ethical starting point and framework in Kant's study of rational religion of which the treatise on evil is a part. On the other hand, the actual notion of radical evil seems to conflict with any ethical view. This tension makes Kant's view of evil potentially very significant for an investigation focussing on ambiguity in relation to evil. The characterisation "ethical" is thus not meant to pigeonhole Kant's view. Rather, it stimulates and leads to important questions concerning Kant's way of dealing with evil.

Yet, Kant's interest in radical evil is not the only remarkable thing about his investigation, which proceeds so firmly on the basis of the ethical principles of the Critique. His investigation into rational religion itself is also remarkable with respect to this starting point. As we have seen, Kant closely connects this investigation of religion to his approach to religion by means of practical reason. Morality does not need religion on its own behalf, yet it does inevitably lead to religion. And only as "that to which morality leads" can religion be studied by the philosopher. Nonetheless, the investigation that takes place in Religion also differs from that of his former ethical investigations. In the context of the Critique of Practical Reason the treatment of religious topics was limited to the postulates about God and immortality. These postulates follow from the

15 RiG 37, RwL 83.
16 This discussion started immediately after the publication of Religion. Goethe and Schiller, for example, expressed their astonishment and annoyance at this turn in Kant's thinking (see the letter from Goethe to Herder on 7 June 1793, and the letter from Schiller to Körner on 28 February 1793). They thought it to be completely at odds with his earlier work. I take the term "foreign element" (Fremdkörper) from an article of Karl Barth (the chapter on Kant in Barth's Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag 1952 2, 237-78) 204; translated as Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: its Background and History (London: S.C.M. Press, 1972, 266-312) 296-97). He argues that the conclusion that the doctrine of radical evil is a foreign element (Fremdkörper) in Kant's thinking is, on the one hand, too obvious to concur with it but, on the other, it cannot be denied either.
concept of the “highest good.” Through this concept the moral law leads to religion: i.e. “the recognition (Erkenntnis) of all duties as divine commands.”17 In the second Critique Kant did not further elaborate on what this religion precisely is. He only explained the formal status of the ideas of God and immortality and showed the implications of the assumption of these ideas for our understanding of the moral law. But notions like a personified idea of the good, a kingdom of God or a kind of church were not mentioned. These topics do occur in Kant’s investigation into the pure religion of reason. Contingent, historical religion is even a starting point for defining what the religion of reason is precisely. Although he opens his investigation in the prefaces with a recapitulation of the findings of the preceding critical works as regards religion, this study goes much further. Kant does not elaborate on this difference nor does he clarify how the topic of radical evil is precisely related to this new investigation into religion. This absence of a clarification of both the precise relation of this investigation to the Critiques and the theme of evil is remarkable: both themes are new and imply an extension in comparison to the Critique of Practical Reason. What precisely, then, is the relation between this new study and Kant’s earlier investigations? Does Kant need to alter his ethical approach in order to incorporate a broader and less formal concept of religion? And does this throw light on the remarkable fact that he discusses the theme of radical evil? These questions will be important in our analysis. For the moment we can note only the remarkable fact that Kant turns to the new topic of radical evil in the new investigation into rational religion.

Raising the theme of evil within the context of an investigation into religion — this could just as well have meant a discussion of the problem of theodicy. Kant deals with theodicy elsewhere.18 His discussion of evil in Religion is of a different kind. It does not deal with solving the problem of the existence of evil in a world created by a good and omnipotent God. Because Kant does not choose the framework of theodicy but

17 KpV 129, CpR 244.

a different approach — which we will discover below — he fits into my search for reflective approaches to evil other than theodicy that do not, however, lose sight of religious meanings. Moreover, Kant turns in Religion from a formal dealing with religion in the form of the postulates to a broader understanding in which contingent, historical aspects are examined. He aims to take aspects of lived religion into account. Thus, Kant seems to be significant for the further discussion of our problem of the relation between reflection and experiences of evil: it is precisely when dealing with evil that he abandons his formal approach for one which is oriented to historical reality. We will look at this relation below and discuss, for example, the role played by the notion of “experience” in Kant’s investigation.

As a final point in this explanation of the choice of Kant as exponent of an ethical view, I would like to mention some conspicuous links between the thinking of Ricœur and that of Kant. Kant opens his “Part One,” in which he deals with evil, with the complaint “that the world lieth in evil.” He traces this remark back to the “oldest among all fictions, the religion of the priests.” Thus, like Ricœur, he naturally situates the notion of evil in a religious context. This general, religious remark concerning the world as a whole is then swiftly interpreted as the problem of whether human beings are good or evil as a species. Evil is thus discussed as part of the question of the moral nature of human beings in general. The theme of specific evil acts is treated in relation to this general question. This use of the term “evil” means that he ignores suffering as evil. As we will see, Kant is interested in evil as something human beings commit and for which they are fully responsible. This focus corresponds to what we have called an ethical view of evil. Ricœur emphasised the primacy of this ethical view in general as well as the fact that it is closest to our contemporary experience of evil. Moreover, the notion of original innocence is important in Kant’s dealing with evil. He argues that “every evil action must be considered, whenever we seek its rational origin, as if the human being had fallen into it directly from the state of innocence.” This innocence seems to be at odds with the radical character of evil. I will come back to this problem below; but here I simply want to point out the similarity to Ricœur’s view of evil. He also emphasises that,

19 This statement is a quotation from 1 John 5:19, in German: “Wir wissen, daß wir von Gott sind und die ganze Welt im Argen liegt.”
20 RiG 20, RwL 70.
21 RiG 41, RwL 86.
on the one hand, evil should not be seen as fundamental: the fundamen-
tal structures of the human being are good. On the other hand, evil is
total and radical. It is precisely these conflicting aspects that caused
Ricœur to call evil absurd. These apparent similarities between the views
of Ricœur and Kant will also be discussed below. Subsequently, I will
also explore the relation between their thinking in a more detailed way
in the final chapter.

I have now explained the reasons for discussing Kant’s view of radical
evil and approaching it as an ethical view. Kant’s treatment of radical
evil in Religion constitutes a very specific ethical view which is perhaps
different from his earlier ethical thinking. It has become clear now that
it is important to investigate this issue not just to point to continuity and
discontinuity in Kant’s work. This issue is also crucial to understanding
the notion of radical evil itself and to answering our general questions
concerning ambiguity, the role of experience and the religious context.
Therefore I will look not only at Kant’s Religion but also at a main ethical
work, i.e. Critique of Practical Reason. I will analyse the aims and out-
come of this book by focussing on how the theme of evil functions in this
work. Let us turn to this book now.

3.2. The Notion of Evil in the Critique of Practical Reason

In the Critique of Practical Reason Kant is concerned primarily with the
question of whether pure reason can determine the will.\textsuperscript{22} If it turns out
to be possible to formulate a principle for this determination Kant has
justified the statement that pure reason can be practical. Very closely
related to this aim is the question of the possibility of freedom. If the
human will may be called free, then practical reason alone, i.e. not in an
“empirically conditioned” form, determines the will. Thus it seems that
the notions of freedom and of the will as determined by reason are equal
in meaning. The notion of the moral law also belongs to this set of prin-
cipal ethical notions in Kant’s thinking.\textsuperscript{23} By this term he indicates the
objective practical law that would obtain “for the will of every rational
being.”\textsuperscript{24} Through this law practical reason would determine the will and

\textsuperscript{22} E.g. KpV 15, CpR 148.
\textsuperscript{23} Cf. also the preface to the Critique of Practical Reason where Kant argues first that
with the faculty of practical reason freedom is also established, and secondly that freedom
is proved by the moral law (KpV 3, 4, CpR 139, 140).
\textsuperscript{24} KpV 19, CpR 153.
this state would be one of freedom. From these short remarks one may conclude that Kant is interested primarily in the objective, rational character of morality. Freedom seems to be understood as rational willing and acting — i.e. acting in accordance with the moral law — and not so much as choosing to act in accordance with the moral law or not. Of course, this interest in objectivity relates to the binding character of such an objective morality. If pure reason can be practical, this means that also in the area of acting, objective knowledge is possible. We would then know what our moral duty is. As we will see below, this focus on the possibility of a will determined by reason results in a disregard of what in fact hinders our will from being determined by reason. Thus, the theme of “evil” is, in the long run, not very prominent in the Critique of Practical Reason. In this section the reasons for this absence will have to be discussed further, as well as the consequences for the nature of Kant’s ethical investigation.

3.2.1. Freedom

First, we need to understand the issues at stake in Kant’s search for the possibility of the will determined by reason, i.e. the free will. In the Critique of Pure Reason the notion of freedom is also discussed and turns out to be very problematic. Kant expresses this problem in the third antinomy of pure reason.25 This antinomy concerns the issue of whether we should assume that there is causality through freedom (Kausalität durch Freiheit) in addition to causality in accordance with the laws of nature.26 This causality through freedom means that “something happens without its cause being further determined by another previous cause.”27 This is freedom in the transcendental sense, i.e. “an absolute causal spontaneity beginning from itself a series of appearances.” The antinomy rises because theoretical reason may argue both in favour of this causality...
through freedom and against it. Thus, freedom can never be a necessary concept. Eventually, Kant does solve this antinomy by making clear that each of the arguments refers to a different area: causality through freedom refers to *phenomena* as caused by *noumena*, while natural causality only refers to the interrelatedness of the things as appearances (*phenomena*). Yet this solution proves neither the reality of freedom nor its possibility; it says only that this concept is not impossible as it does not conflict with nature. But we still cannot understand causality through freedom. Therefore, in the first *Critique* the notion of freedom remains problematic.

What is problematic for speculative reason, however, is shown to be real by practical reason. Practical reason is concerned with determining the will: this determination has the form of an “ought,” an obligation. We can conceive of this “ought” only if human beings are not entirely determined by natural laws. Practical freedom, which presupposes transcendental freedom, is thus necessary in order to think “obligation.” Here we see, again, how practical reason, freedom and the moral law interrelate: freedom exists when obligation exists, i.e. when practical reason is truly able to determine the will by means of a law. Eventually, Kant does, indeed, conclude that this is possible — through the moral law or the categorical imperative. This law is independent of personal goals and values and can therefore obtain for every rational being. It is purely formal, because any substantial or material interpretation would make the law empirical and therefore subjective. The law thus corresponds with a state of independence from personal pleasure or displeasure. All these negative qualifications of the moral law correspond with the negative concept of freedom, i.e. independence from the natural law. A free will is wholly determined by the purely formal law of reason and not by the things of the natural world. This affirms again the close connection between the concepts of freedom and objective practical law.

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29 *KrV* A 559/ B 587, *CpureR* 546.
32 According to Kant, the practical principles that are determined by a material object all belong, in the end, to the same principle of self-love or one’s own happiness. These are empirical principles which can never become practical laws (*KpV* 21-26, *CpR* 155-60).
33 Kant concludes about the relationship between the two that they “reciprocally imply each other” (*KpV* 29, *CpR* 162).
However, this connection may also be expressed positively. Kant eventually phrases the moral law as follows: “So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law.” The state in which practical reason determines the will by means of this law may also be called “lawgiving of its own” or “autonomy.” This is freedom in the positive sense. The moral law thus expresses the rule according to which practical reason determines our willing. That this is a state of “lawgiving of its own” already reveals the obvious character of this law. Reason prescribes it to us “with necessity.” This inherence of the moral law in practical reason is expressed in the remarkable concept of the “fact of reason.” With the label “fact” Kant points out that the law is not something to which we conclude on the basis of other data; it “forces itself upon us.” Kant does not just mean this in some formal sense, e.g. that because this is a principle of reason it must be necessary and obvious to us. Also practically, in relation

36 KpV 30, CpR 164.
37 Translation of “diese eigene Gesetzgebung” (KpV 33, CpR 166). Beck remarks that this word is taken from political imagery (A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason, op. cit., 180).
38 For the terms “negative” and “positive” in relation to freedom see KpV 33, CpR 166. According to Beck, the negative and positive side of freedom can be identified with the terms Willkür and Wille respectively (A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason, op. cit., 176ff., esp. 180 n.10). Willkür is freedom in the sense of “spontaneity, the faculty of initiating a new causal series in time.” Wille is freedom as autonomy. These concepts originate from different works of Kant: the first from the Critique of Pure Reason and the second from The Foundations. In the Critique of Practical Reason the two notions are unified in one concept of freedom, which can be understood in a negative and a positive sense.
39 KpV 30, CpR 163. Cf. the statement in which this necessity is expressed very exuberantly: “The practical rule is therefore unconditional and so is represented a priori as a categorical practical proposition by which the will is objectively determined absolutely and immediately” (KpV 31, CpR 164).
40 KpV 31, 32, 42, 43, 47, 55, 91, CpR 164, 165, 173, 174, 177, 184, 213. Beck (A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason, op. cit., 166-70) emphasizes that at first glance this concept of “fact of reason” seem imprecise. It seems to mean both consciousness of the moral law, and the moral law itself, and autonomy. Beck eventually concludes that this plurality of meanings is present only on the surface. They are, rather, different facets that may be gathered in the assertion that the moral law is a fact of pure reason as well as a fact for pure reason. It is a law which reason gives to itself and can therefore be known a priori. As such, it can be called a fact of pure reason. But it is, at the same time, a fact for pure reason because reason presents the law to itself. The moral law is the only fact of this kind.
41 KpV 31, CpR 164. Cf.: “a fact — for so we may call a determination of the will that is unavoidable even though it does not rest upon empirical principles” (KpV 55, CpR 184); “a fact that precedes all subtle reasoning about its possibility and all the consequences that may be drawn from it” (KpV 91, CpR 213).
Regarding the conflict between morality and the principle of one's own happiness Kant argues: "This conflict, however, is not merely logical, like that between empirically conditioned rules that one might nevertheless want to raise to necessary principles; it is instead practical and would ruin morality altogether were not the voice of reason in reference to the will so distinct, so irrepressible and so audible even to the most common human beings" (KpV 35, CpR 168).

Freedom is thus proved to be real because it is implied in the determination of the will by reason that is made possible through the moral law. But this does not mean that it is possible to have insight into or knowledge of this practical reality.

This short account of the relation between freedom and practical reason is already a good illustration of Kant’s preoccupation with the possibility of a will determined by reason. We may conclude that Kant’s investigation into the question of whether pure reason can be practical has a positive result. Reason is able to determine the will through the moral law, which implies a state of freedom. This law is obvious to everybody, so moral action seems natural. However, in the same section in which Kant introduces the notion of autonomy, the term “heteronomy” also appears. This term means “dependence upon the natural law of following some impulse or inclination.” It is the opposite of autonomy and thus of morality. The ruling principle here is not the moral law but the principle of “self-love” or “one’s own happiness.” Here Kant means principles that determine the will by the representation of some material object. The subject wants to realise this object; its relation to the object is then one of pleasure (Lust). Pleasure — and the same holds for displeasure — is thus the condition for keeping the rule, which is why Kant speaks of an “empirical determining ground of choice.” From these

42 Regarding the conflict between morality and the principle of one’s own happiness Kant argues: “This conflict, however, is not merely logical, like that between empirically conditioned rules that one might nevertheless want to raise to necessary principles; it is instead practical and would ruin morality altogether were not the voice of reason in reference to the will so distinct, so irrepressible and so audible even to the most common human beings” (KpV 35, CpR 168).

43 KpV 36, CpR 169.

44 E.g. KpV 49, CpR 179.

45 KpV 33, CpR 166.

46 KpV 35, CpR 168.

47 KpV 22, CpR 155.

48 KpV 21, CpR 155.
notions of heteronomy and self-love it is clear that human willing may also be determined by rules other than the moral law. These rules never hold for every rational being and are thus not candidates for the universal moral law. But they do reveal something about human willing: that there is a conflict between autonomy and its immoral opposite of heteronomy. The moral law may be obvious, but it is not the only possible determining ground of our will. From the possible material principles the possibility of a will not determined by reason comes into view — and with this the possibility of evil. This possibility is confirmed by the term that indicates the form of the moral law: it is an imperative. An “imperative” is a rule that is formulated with an “ought.” \(^49\) This “ought” already implies that one’s will does not of itself conform to the law; reason is not the only ground which may determine the will. Human beings are rational, but they are also “affected by needs and sensible motives.” \(^50\) This specific nature of human beings introduces a certain tension into Kant’s discovery of the possibility of the will determined by reason. This tension is of course significant in relation to our theme of evil. We will further investigate below how Kant deals with the problem that the will of human beings, in spite of the obvious character of the moral law, is not always determined by it.

### 3.2.2. Good and Evil in Itself

The only passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where the term “evil” (Böse) is frequently used is that concerning “the concept of an object of pure practical reason.” \(^51\) This concept is defined as “the representation of an object as an effect possible through freedom.” \(^52\) The notion of an object is controversial in relation to pure practical reason. In his search for an objective moral law Kant argues that if a principle presupposes an object whose reality is desired as the ground that determines the will, this principle can never become a practical law. \(^53\) For such a principle is empirical and has no objective necessity. In spite of this problematic status, the question is raised as to what counts as an object in relation to pure practical reason and what does not. Here, however,

\(^49\) KpV 20, CpR 154.
\(^50\) KpV 32, CpR 165.
\(^51\) The first part of the second chapter of the “Analytic” is concerned with this topic (KpV 57-67, CpR 186-94).
\(^52\) KpV 57, CpR 186.
\(^53\) KpV 22, CpR 155.
what is meant by “object” is not its functioning as determining ground; for the determining ground is the moral law. The object is simply the result of any act in accordance with the moral law. The only criterion for being an object of practical reason is moral possibility. If the object is morally possible it is good, if not it is evil. Thus good and evil are the only objects of practical reason. Good and evil have to be distinguished from well-being (Wohl) and ill-being (Übel). These terms refer to things which cause pleasure or displeasure. If these concepts were to be the determining ground of our willing, this would result in an empirical law; subjective feelings would determine our willing, which would never result in a practical law that obtains for everybody. However, Kant has proved that the will can be determined by an a priori objective law. This means that good and evil must “not be determined before the moral law but only after it and by means of it.” Then these terms refer to objects that reasonable human beings desire or to which they have an aversion, e.g. “truthfulness as opposed to lying, justice as opposed to violence, and so forth.” Here we find what is good and evil “in itself.”

Although this passage on the objects of pure practical reason is the first and sole place where Kant goes into the theme of evil, it does not clarify much. Kant does not so much focus on the distinction between good and evil but on what is good or evil “in itself” and what is good or evil “for something.” The point Kant wants to make is that only the moral law and not pleasure, i.e. an experience, can determine what is good or evil in itself. We do not, therefore, learn much more about the possibility of and motives for doing evil. Moreover, Kant does not even elaborate on that to which “evil in itself” precisely corresponds. Apparently, he leaves it to the reader to infer this from his argumentation regarding what is good in itself, in which he is, after all, more interested.

54 KpV 58, CpR 186. 
55 KpV 60, CpR 188. 
56 KpV 63, CpR 190. 
57 KpV 61, CpR 189. 
58 KpV 62, CpR 190. 
59 The German expressions are “für sich selbst” and “irgend wozu” (KpV 59, CpR 187). 
60 This is especially striking in the paragraph on the “appraisal of what is good and evil in itself, as distinguished from that which can be called so only with reference to well-being or ill-being” (KpV 62, CpR 190). Here Kant does examine the question of what a good act is but does not do the same for evil acts. Yet I do not agree with Norbert Fischer’s conclusion that we should “rightly expect” a discussion of the conditions that determine the good or evil character of acts here. He states that an appraisal of the an sich evil should have followed. The fact that it does not follow is, according to Fischer, a clear sign that Kant has avoided the “Beurteilung des an sich Bösen” in the Critique of Practical Reason.
The absence of any elaboration on the theme of evil here is thus the result of Kant’s interest in moral objectivity and in what is morally correct. We do find here, however, a delineation of the notion of evil. It is “the necessary object of the faculty of aversion (Verabscheuungsvermögens) … in accordance with a principle of reason.” Kant aims to clarify the distinction between the appraisal of what is good and evil in itself and what is good and evil in the sense of well-being and ill-being, not just the internal appraisal of what is good and evil in itself (Norbert Fischer, “Der formale Grund der Bösen Tat. Das Problem der Zurechnung in der Praktischen Philosophie Kants,” in: Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung 42 (1988), 18-44; here p. 32).

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3.2.3. Self-Love

The first passages that come to mind are those discussing the notion of a will that is not determined by the moral law but by the principle of “self-love” or “one’s own happiness” (eigene Glückseligkeit). In the first chapter of the “Analytic” the principle that makes a representation of a material object the determining ground of the will is defined as self-love. This principle is discussed as a possible candidate for the objective moral law. In the end it turns out to be unsuitable for this, as it is based on the contingent desire or aversion of the individual, on subjective feelings of pleasure or displeasure. This discussion reveals that, although this principle of self-love cannot be the moral law, it is apparently present in human beings. What is the status of this principle of self-love? It is characteristic of human beings as such and can be traced back to the receptivity and sensibility of finite human beings: they are open to feelings of pleasure and displeasure caused by material objects. Moreover, “to be happy is necessarily the demand of every rational but finite being and
therefore an unavoidable determining ground of its faculty of desire.” 65
Satisfaction with one’s whole existence is something which human beings
desire but do not possess. They are “needy.” However, this principle of
self-love is not an easy rule for governing how we act. Over against the
obvious and easy character of autonomy, Kant emphasises that heteronomy
is difficult and “always veiled in impenetrable obscurity.” 66 The moral
law is something that human beings are able to keep; but the principle
of self-love is not so easily satisfied, especially not for every single per-
son. Self-love thus turns out to correspond with the sensible and needy
nature of human beings; but it does not produce any rule for moral act-
ing. Again, this discussion is set by Kant’s aim to prove the existence and
clarity of the objective moral law. On the other hand, it is clear that Kant
does not ignore human sensitivity to things that arouse desire or incur
aversion, i.e. the human sensitivity to self-love. Still, it is not clear how
prominent precisely self-love is, as the moral law is the most obvious
and easy principle of our willing.

In the third chapter of the “Analytic” Kant comes back to this topic.
Here he calls humans “beings whose reason does not by its nature
necessarily conform with the objective law.” 67 They can be determined
by other principles. Thus, the problem is how the objective law becomes
an incentive, i.e. “the subjective determining ground of the will.” 68 Kant
immediately concludes that the question of “how a law can be of itself
and immediately a determining ground of the will” is insoluble, just like
the question of how a free will is possible. Subsequently, he confines
himself to showing what the consequences are of the incentive of the
moral law for the mind that is also open to other incentives. The complete
regulation of the will by the moral law has important consequences for
other incentives: it thwarts all our inclinations. 69 Here, the term “self-love”—Selbstliebe or Eigenliebe—reappears. It is one of the forms of “regard
for oneself” (Selbstsucht), the other being “self-conceit” (Eigendünkel). 70
The consequences of the moral law for each are different. The law strikes
down self-conceit, while self-love may still be adjusted in the direction

65 KpV 25, CpR 159.
66 KpV 36, CpR 169.
67 KpV 72, CpR 198.
68 KpV 72, CpR 198.
69 KpV 73, CpR 199.
70 Self-love is benevolence towards oneself, self-conceit the satisfaction with oneself. Selbstsucht refers here to
the totality of inclinations aiming at one’s own happiness (KpV 73, CpR 199).
of the moral law, resulting in a form of rational self-love. Thus, the moral law “humiliates us in our self-consciousness.” At the same time, however, it creates a feeling of respect for itself. These are the consequences of the moral law on our mind. It is clear that Kant takes into account that human beings are inclined to let material objects, instead of the moral law, determine the ground of their willing. The moral law strikes down this inclination. But how fierce is this struggle of incentives? Does self-love vanish into thin air before the clarity of the moral law? What is stronger in practice, the moral law or self-love? These questions are not Kant’s, although they seem to be raised by his reasoning. Kant concentrates on the negative and positive consequences of the moral law and not on the other, material incentives. Thus, the concept of self-love, as the counterpart of the moral law does not receive any sharper focus in this chapter.

3.2.4. The Obvious Character of the Moral Law and the Reality of Evil

So far we have observed that Kant is more interested in what is morally correct than in evil. This preoccupation was at least partly explained as the result of his aim to find an objective law that determines our willing. As a result, the character of his investigation is formal: it focuses on the form of a moral law that would hold for every rational being. The question of the actual extent to which practical reason determines human willing is not prominent in such a formal approach. Kant does acknowledge the human openness to other incentives than the moral law. But he discusses this topic primarily in order to show that such incentives can never serve as a principle for objective morality. In such a formal ethics the problem of evil or transgression of the moral law does not seem to be self-evident, for it does not alter the fact that this moral law obtains for all rational beings. However, I have already referred several times to Kant’s remarks concerning the obvious character of the moral law. I argued that he means this not just in the formal sense but also in the practical sense: the moral law is so clear to us that it is not at all difficult to determine in practice which acts are in accordance with it. Heteronomy, on the other

71 KpV 74, CpR 200.
72 See pp. 108, 109 above. One easily finds remarks similar to that mentioned above, e.g.: “But if one asks: What, then, really is pure morality, by which as a touchstone one must test the moral content of every action? I must admit that only philosophers can make the decision of this question doubtful, for it is long since decided in common reason, not
hand, is difficult and obscure. These remarks do seem to be concerned with moral practice. Thus, the purely formal character of Kant’s ethical approach seems to be broken. Here the question arises as to whether the moral law is indeed so obvious to human beings that they may easily act in accordance with it — do we not observe, in practice, rather the opposite of morally correct behaviour? Thus, the theme of the obvious character of the moral law is relevant in relation to our theme of evil.

In passages dealing with the obvious character of the moral law Kant often uses the word *gemein* — translated as “common” or “ordinary” — to characterise the understanding that is aware of the moral law etc. The purpose of this word is clear: one does not have to be learned or wise to know what is objectively morally good. Kant’s own formal argumentation is, apparently, not the only road that leads to awareness of the moral law, freedom and autonomy. In fact, these are things that every rational being understands easily. How is this possible? Kant argues that the conflict between the moral law and the principle of self-love would ruin morality “were not the voice of reason in reference to the will so distinct, so irrepressible and so audible even to the most common human beings.” Kant claims this obvious character for almost everything that relates to morality: e.g. the form of the maxim which lends itself to general law-giving, the difference between morality and self-love, duty, the moral law and its non-empirical character, the idea of personality which causes the feeling of respect, the truth of the idea of causality through freedom etc. Why does Kant use this, so to say, popular argumentation besides the formal, philosophical one? First, it may be seen as a translation of what is called in philosophical language the a priori character of morality. In order to know one’s moral duty, one does not need empirical
knowledge, i.e. "knowledge of the world." Moreover, the argumentation on the basis of common knowledge underlines the universal character of the moral law. It holds for everyone and always; it expresses the duty of every rational being. How can we be obliged to this duty if we do not know it? To strengthen his claim of the universal, binding character of the moral law Kant refers to common moral knowledge. This means, however, that the argument of the obvious character of the moral law eventually serves the general formal investigation into objective morality. It does not actually imply a break with the general line of argumentation and the orientation to what is morally correct; for Kant does not go further into moral practice. Still, these passages give rise to questions concerning this practice that remain unanswered.

Moreover, it is notable that in the passages in which Kant refers to common moral understanding he often also uses concrete examples of moral or immoral behaviour. Like the references to common understanding, examples break the primarily formal and abstract argumentation.

Cambridge University Press 1996, 37-108), abbreviated below as GMM). In the Groundwork we find some passages where Kant explicitly links "common" to "a priori", e.g.: "... it is clear that all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely a priori in reason, and indeed in the most common reason just as in reason that is speculative in the highest degree ... it is of the greatest practical importance ... because moral laws are to hold for every rational being as such, to derive them from the universal concept of a rational being as such" (GMS 411, 412, GMM 65). Allen Wood refers approvingly to the view of Stephen Engstrom who points out that "common moral rational knowledge" should not be taken here in the sense of common knowledge about morality, not as reflective knowledge at a distance. It is rather the practical knowledge we all have, simply because we belong to the same moral "culture." (Stephen Engstrom, "Kant's Conception of Practical Wisdom," in: Kantstudien 88 (1997), 24-25, cited by Allen W. Wood, Kant's Ethical thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) 19, 20).

Sullivan remarks that Kant draws frequently on the morality of ordinary people. He clarifies this as follows: "Since one cannot have moral obligations that one does not and cannot know about, moral norms and ideals must be available to working people of the most ordinary intelligence" (Roger J. Sullivan, Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) 4). He also refers to Friedrich Paulsen's view that Kant's familiarity with the licentious behaviour of the upper classes on the one hand and the much more strict morality of the working classes on the other brought him to this view (id. 5). In my view, it is not necessary, for the moral law to be universal and binding, that human beings know this law. Then its validity would depend on an empirical fact. Thus, this argument strengthens Kant's discovery of the moral law but is not essential for it.

Moreover, in the examples the possibility of acting against the moral law is depicted self-evidently. Kant mentions rules and acts that are not in keeping with the moral law: e.g. avenging every insult, being careful with one’s money in one’s youth in order to have enough even at old age, taking the amount of satisfaction as leading principle for action, avarice, pursuing one’s own happiness only, ending one’s life at will, deceiving, looking with complete indifference on the needs of others, lying, theft, the inclination to do what conforms with duty, calumny. He points out that such acts or rules can never count as objective moral laws and that this is easy to understand. Thus, the examples serve again to underscore and clarify why necessarily only a formal law can determine the will of every rational being. Still, they also reveal that Kant is aware that in practice human willing is not always determined by the moral law but by other rules, which leads to evil.

The examples have an actual function in Kant’s argumentation and are not just illustrations. Thus, he does not lose touch with moral reality in his investigation into objective morality. On the other hand, one can hardly say that moral reality is smoothly integrated by means of these examples into Kant’s moral philosophy. The examples and arguments from common moral knowledge are rare and seem more to be interruptions than constituting a fully-fledged, continuous strand in the scheme of the second *Critique*. Moreover, they seem to bear evidence of conflicting views: they show both the obviousness of the moral law and the reality of evil. Thus, the non-formal reasoning raises questions that Kant does not discuss; he remains focused on his general aims. He does not even give insight into the reason why human beings do not allow the moral law to determine their willing. Although their receptive and sensible nature makes human beings open to other maxims than the moral law, this does not make clear why they would *actually* choose against it. This is a problem, especially because the moral law is so clear and obvious to human beings. The problem we pointed out regarding the absence of evil in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is therefore broader. It is part of the absence of insight into the mechanisms of concrete moral decisions in general. This might not have been a problem if Kant himself had not abandoned the formal argumentation and dealt with concrete moral situations as well as the clarity of the moral law for common understanding. There seems to be an ambiguity of aims in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of formal ethics on the one hand and concrete moral acting on the other. This ambiguity gives rise to questions that Kant does not indicate, let alone answer, in this *Critique*. 
However, this conclusion is only provisional. The passages discussing the obvious character of the moral law and the examples dealing with moral practice are striking instances of non-formal reasoning. But in the plan of the Critique of Practical Reason Kant did not totally neglect the relation between the formal or abstract investigation of the objective moral law and concrete moral practice. At several points both in the “Analytic” and the “Dialectic” but especially in the second part, the “Doctrine of the Method” (Methodenlehre), Kant is concerned with the practical relevance and worth of the a priori moral knowledge laid bare by his critical method. Do these passages reveal more about moral practice and the problem of not keeping the moral law? The “Typic” (Typik) deals with the task of judging whether a concrete action is morally good or not and formulates a rule for deciding this. The possibility that an act may be not in accordance with the moral law is thus real. But Kant does not pay separate attention to this because his aim is to find “the type of the moral law.” Subsequently, in the third chapter of the “Analytic” Kant discusses the question of how the objective practical law may determine one’s subjective willing. He locates the connection in the incentive of respect, which the moral law incites in us. The negative effect on the other hand, is that the moral law strikes down our self-consciousness. Thus, we do not find a discussion here of the problem that respect is frequently not the incentive of our willing. In the “Dialectic,” finally, moral reality is discussed in the context of the problem that in everyday reality happiness seems to be unrelated to moral virtue. However, this problem is not related to the issue of keeping the moral law or not. These sections are thus closer to what may be called moral practice; but they do not discuss problems that are connected with the theme of evil.

The Methodenlehre, finally, appears to be the part of the Critique in which moral practice is most prominent. Kant himself describes the purpose of this part of the Critique as follows:

Here [i.e. in the Critique of Practical Reason] the doctrine of method [Methodenlehre] is understood ... as the way in which one can provide the laws of pure practical reason with access to the human mind and influence on its maxims ....

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80 The title of Chapter 3 is “On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason,” KpV 71-89, CpR 198-211. See also pp. 112, 113, above.
81 I will deal with the problem of the holy will in the “Dialectic” in section 3.2.5. below.
82 KpV 151-61, CpR 261-69.
83 KpV 151, CpR 261.
The “Doctrine of the method” aims to show that the human mind is in fact open to the pure incentives of the moral law, so that morality is possible. The moral law does have strong power over the human mind. The evidence for this statement is indeed taken from concrete moral practice. It is, e.g., the observation that people from all walks of life are very fond of moral topics in their conversations.\(^{84}\) They reason very subtly and precisely in these cases and enjoy talking about different aspects of moral cases in detail. This illustrates that human beings are receptive to pure morality. But Kant emphasises plainly that this possibility does not prove to be any concrete “moral improvement.”\(^{85}\) The only point he wants to make is that the feeling of respect for the moral law is real. Moreover, he adds that “since the method has never yet been widely practiced experience can say nothing of its result.” This argumentation makes clear, again, that Kant’s focus and interest lies in the nature and status of the objective moral law. Also, when he announces in the Methodelehre that he will deal explicitly with moral practice, he emphasises the power of the moral law in the determination of our will. He does not go into what bears evidence against this.

Now that we have dealt with these different passages discussing parts of moral reality it is clear that these discussions are completely determined by the question of the possibility of objective morality. Thus, it is perhaps overstating the case to speak of an “ambiguity of aims” in the Critique of Practical Reason. The formal interest provides the focus to the parts dealing with moral practice. Still, because Kant refers to moral reality, the reader cannot help but become very curious about another aspect of this reality: that people in general do not seem to be guided by the moral law. Does Kant never deal with this aspect within the framework of the second Critique? At the end of this section we deal with the last possible candidates for revealing something of the reality of moral evil.

3.2.5. Not a Holy Will

So far, we have seen that Kant views human beings as open to other principles than the moral law. We did not, however, gain insight into the extent to which this characteristic of human nature determines their acting. In relation to this issue Kant’s remarks that human beings do not

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\(^{84}\) KpV 153, 154, CpR 262, 263.

\(^{85}\) KpV 153, CpR 262.
Allen W. Wood argues that presupposed in this impossibility of a holy will is the doctrine of radical evil. The presence of other incentives than the moral law cannot as such be the reason that human beings cannot attain holiness of will. For these incentives are not as such evil. Evil consists in a free act in which the right order of maxims is inverted. Thus there must be a different reason for this lack of holiness than human sensibility. This reason is the propensity in human beings to evil, which is a characteristic of the free power of choice. Human beings cannot extirpate it themselves. Therefore they cannot attain holiness of will (Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Moral Religion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1970) 107-116). I am not sure that this interpretation is correct. In my view Kant argues that the presence of other incentives than the moral law means that there is always a struggle, that for human beings there are always rules besides the moral law. This finite rational nature of human beings may be contrasted with a “supremely self-sufficient intelligence” or “a perfect being” who possesses a holy will. A holy will is incapable of any other maxims than that of the moral law. Human beings may have a pure will but not a holy one. Time and again human beings have to attune their behaviour to the moral law. Still, this is precisely the situation in which we can speak of morality. Morality concerns the duty to direct our actions to the objective practical law. The moral law can determine our willing, but that implies the abandonment of personal pleasure as the guide for our acting. However, we can never abandon our nature as finite rational beings; maxims other than the moral law lie in wait. In order to point out this specific nature of human beings and the nature of morality Kant introduces the contrasting notion of the holy will. Moreover, the holiness of the will is something for which we should strive in an endless progress; it is a practical idea, an archetype or model (*Urbilde*). But human beings can never possess a holy will seem to be relevant; for they suggest that human willing is in fact never completely in accordance with the moral law. Does this idea of not having a holy will indeed reveal something about moral reality and evil? The notion first appears in the “Analytic.” It is used in an argumentation that clarifies the status of the moral law as an imperative and the character of morality as duty. For human beings the moral law takes the shape of an imperative. They are finite and rational and therefore receptive to all kinds of maxims besides the moral law. This finite rational nature of human beings may be contrasted with a “supremely self-sufficient intelligence” or “a perfect being” who possesses a holy will. A holy will is incapable of any other maxims than that of the moral law. 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possess it, for that would imply a transformation of their finite nature into that of a Deity.\(^92\)

In the “Dialectic” the idea of holiness appears in the context of the notion of the highest good and the postulates. The production of the highest good in this world is the necessary object of the good will. This highest good, as the totality of the object of pure practical reason, is the perfection, the unconditioned that is sought by practical reason. The condition for the production of this highest good is that the will is in “complete conformity” with the moral law.\(^93\) This, however, would be a state of holiness. As in the “Analytic,” Kant argues that this is not something of which “rational beings of the sensible world” are capable. Nevertheless, it is necessarily implied in the notion of the highest good. Kant solves this problem by assuming an endless progression towards this ideal. This means that rational beings have an endless existence, also called the immortality of the soul. This postulate of immortality has to be assumed in order to avoid either a weakening of the demand of the moral law or the fallacy that holiness can be fully acquired. Again, the notion of the holiness of the will thus functions as a contrasting notion as well as an expression of the ideal of practical reason. It makes clear that the will of human beings is by nature also capable of following other maxims than that of the moral law. The extent, however, to which human beings in fact act in accordance with the law is not clarified in this argument. It is clear that morality implies a struggle for human beings, because the moral law has to compete with other maxims for the determination of the will. But Kant does not indicate here how fierce this struggle is.

3.2.6. Hinting at Radical Evil?

So far, we have not found in the *Critique* a specific discussion of the theme of evil, let alone that of radical evil. We have already seen that the notion of radical evil points at the innate and total character of evil, or at a propensity to evil. The question rose whether this idea of radical evil is a foreign element in Kant’s thinking. This seems to be affirmed as far as the *Critique of Practical Reason* is concerned. Still, there are some
isolated remarks in this writing that seem to hint at something like radical evil or at least display a negative view of human moral practice. To complete our search for the theme of evil in the second *Critique* I mention these passages.

Moreover the moral law is given, as it were, as a fact of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious and which is apodictically certain, though it be granted that no example of exact observance of it can be found in experience.

This passage is part of an argument about the deduction of the principle of practical reason. Kant states that the moral law cannot be proved by deduction. It is a fact of reason that cannot be empirically verified. Even though there is no example in reality of which one may say that the moral law was wholly kept, the moral law “is firmly established of itself.”

This statement, that there may be no example of it, is stronger than one would expect — at least on the basis of Kant’s statements on the obviousness of the moral law to common understanding. It also seems to go further than the observation that human beings are always open to other maxims than the moral law. Yet it is not clear whether Kant formulates it here hypothetically or as a conclusion. The expression “exact observance” is not very clear either.

For, since in human beings all good is defective [mangelhaft], the law made intuitive by an example still strikes down my pride, the standard being furnished by the man I see before me whose impurity [Unlauterkeit], such as it may be, is not so well known to me as is my own who therefore appears to me in a purer light.

In this section Kant determines the incentive of pure practical reason, i.e. respect. He distinguishes respect from mere admiration. Respect is always directed only at persons and in them only at the moral law. Kant substantiates this statement with the example of “a humble common man”
who exhibits the moral law. This example strikes down my self-conceit. Thus, even when I think myself to be just as upright as this man, the feeling of respect remains. Our goodness is always “defective:” we can never be proud of ourselves, as we are never wholly in accordance with the moral law that this man so clearly represents. This consciousness of the inadequacy of our moral behaviour is also expressed in the following passages, which are taken from the same chapter.

For, in the case of what we highly esteem but yet dread (because of consciousness of our weakness), through increased facility in satisfying it the most reverential dread changes into liking and respect into love; at least this would be the consummate perfection of a disposition devoted to the law, if it were possible for a creature to attain it.99

This idea of personality, awakening respect by setting before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in its vocation) while at the same time showing us the lack of accord of our conduct with respect to it and thus striking down self-conceit, is natural even to the most common human reason and is easily observed.100

Here the negative effect of the moral law in the striking down of self-conceit is not just meant in the formal sense, i.e. that there is no place for other principles if the moral law determines our willing. It also seems to make us truly aware of the defective character of our acting.

Finally, the most striking passage, which may, indeed, be said to hint actually at radical evil, comes from the section about the postulate of God. It speaks for itself:

The moral law is holy (inflexible) and demands holiness of morals, although all the moral perfection that a human being can attain is still only virtue, that is, a disposition conformed with law from respect for law, and thus consciousness of a continuing propensity to transgression or at least impurity, that is, an admixture of many spurious (not moral) motives to observe the law, hence a self-esteem combined with humility; and so, with respect to the holiness that the Christian law demands, nothing remains for a creature but endless progress, though for that very reason he is justified in hoping for this endless duration.101

With this hint at radical evil our investigation into the ethical theory of the Critique of Practical Reason ends. We have dealt with passages that would possibly reveal something about the tension between moral law and moral practice and perhaps also about evil. The conclusion that follows

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99 KpV 84, CpR 208.
100 KpV 87, CpR 210.
from this analysis is by now clear: Kant is interested primarily in the possibility of morally correct acting. His main question is formal: what obtains as an objective moral law? He refers to moral reality now and then in relation to the issue of how this moral law influences human willing. But these references underscore and affirm his main line of reasoning. The struggle that morality entails for human beings does not receive much attention. Thus, the theme of evil hardly figures in the *Critique*: Kant is interested in what is morally correct. In his critical ethical investigation evil is not a separate theme. This seems remarkable in the light of the discussion of radical evil in *Religion*. Why did Kant not deal with this idea in the *Critique*? Why is he so certain in his conclusions concerning the obvious character of the moral law if he later takes the possibility of a radical evil in human beings seriously? However, in order to determine whether these questions are appropriate and whether the absence of evil in the second *Critique* is truly remarkable we first have to gain a better understanding of the discussion of radical evil in *Religion*. Of course, the precise relation of *Religion* to the *Critique* will be an important point of attention in our investigation of this discussion.

### 3.3. Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone and Radical Evil

How does Kant deal with evil in *Religion*? This question has already become more precise on the basis of our analysis of the *Critique*. The theme of evil is hardly discussed in the *Critique* because the issue of morally correct acting is primary. How then does Kant subsequently introduce the theme of evil, even *radical* evil, within this ethical framework? I have already pointed out that the prefaces of *Religion* link up with the ethical approach of the second *Critique*. But is this approach subsequently continued in the essay on radical evil itself? Or does Kant need to adjust his ethical theory to be able to incorporate the theme of radical evil? And does he indeed incorporate it or does it remain a foreign element in a mainly ethical argumentation? And what precisely is the relation between the theme of evil and the investigation into rational religion? Why does the topic of evil receive ample treatment now, while it did not seem to be important in the *Critique*? The examination of these questions is needed for the general themes of my investigation. In this way the possible value of a reflective ethical approach is discussed as

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102 See pp. 99, 100 above.
well as the issue of the relation between religion and evil. Because of
Kant’s dense and difficult argumentation a detailed reading of the first
part of Religion — the essay on radical evil — is necessary to answer
these questions. The focus on this first part is justified because Kant
discusses the theme of radical evil here. In the other parts he builds on
the demarcation of the issue in the first but does not discover any more
fundamental aspects.

The aim of Religion is, as we have seen above, the purely philosoph-
ical project of holding fragments of some historical religion up to moral
concepts in order to find a rational religion. By “historical religion”
Kant means first of all Christianity — the religion with which he is most
familiar. This investigation into religion within the limits of reason
alone subsequently opens with the treatise concerning radical evil in
human nature. Kant does not explain why. A single remark is found in a
subordinate clause in the preface:

… to make apparent the relation of religion to a human nature partly laden
with good dispositions and partly with evil ones, I represent the relationship
of the good and the evil principles as two equally self-subsisting transient
causes affecting men ….

The only thing that may be inferred from this remark is that the topics of
good and evil receive attention because Kant is interested in “the relation
of religion to a human nature partly laden with good dispositions and
partly with evil ones.” It is not clear whether the theme of “radical evil
in human nature” is itself part of the historical religion Kant examines.
He does not indicate that he sees it as such. One finds little explicitly
religious material in the first part. In the other parts the religious “frag-
mants” are obvious. Here however, one finds, apart from the first sen-
tence, explicit references to religion only at the end of Part One, mainly
in section IV and in the “General Remark” that follows. Besides these
sections, it seems that Kant reasons wholly in ethical language. Moreover,
his line of reasoning seems to be wholly set up on the basis of ethical
principles and not on that of some specific religious doctrine. This means

103 I refer to the different divisions of the Religion as follows. The four Stücke are
referred to as “Parts,” with capital “P,” e.g., Part One. The subdivisions within these parts
I call “sections.”
104 See pp. 97, 99 above.
105 See also Reiner Wimmer, Kants kritische Religionsphilosophie (Berlin and New York:
Walter de Gruyter 1990) 92. Kant fills in Christianity for the term “religion” explicitly
only at the end of the first section (RtG 52, RwL 95).
106 RtG 11, RwL 63.
that our question of the relation between the theme of evil and religion as well as the problem of the ethical character of his reasoning are not easy to resolve. It is remarkable that Kant does not go explicitly into these topics even though they seem to force themselves upon the reader. Let us look at this remarkable text now.

3.3.1. The Question of the Moral Nature of Human Beings

Kant’s question in the first part of *Religion* is that of the moral nature of human beings in general. Are they good or evil by nature? Kant hastens to clarify the term “nature.” For, in the vocabulary of the *Critique of Practical Reason* the term “nature” was opposed to “freedom.” It referred to that part of our willing and acting for which we are not responsible and which, thus, does not have moral relevance. Here, however, the nature of human beings is defined as “the subjective ground of the exercise of the human being’s freedom in general, antecedent to every deed that falls within the scope of the senses.” This subjective ground must be understood as being a free act itself. Thus, our moral nature — whether good or evil — is something we choose freely and for which we are fully responsible. We do not choose it at a particular moment in time, however. Therefore, Kant argues, this subjective ground should be conceived as innate, i.e. as “already present in human beings at the moment of birth” — before any concrete free act. But, of course, although it is innate in human beings, “nature is not to blame for it, nor does it deserve praise.” Human beings are “alone its author.” We should note that from the beginning Kant reckons more with the possibility that human moral nature is evil than with the possibility that it is good. For the

107 As regards human moral nature Kant assumes a rigorist position: it is either good or evil but not neither or both at once. For the human being either accepts the moral law as the determining ground of his acting or not; in the first case the human being is good and in the second evil. Human beings are thus never indifferent as regards the moral law, and also not both good and evil (RiG 22-25, RwL 71-74).
108 RiG 21, RwL 70. Kant also uses the term *Gesinnung*, translated as “disposition,” to indicate this subjective ground.
109 RiG 25, RwL 74.
110 RiG 21, 22, RwL 70, 71. Cf. also RiG 25, RwL 74: “always, from his youth on.”
111 RiG 21, RwL 71.
112 This is already clear from the title of Part One: “Concerning the indwelling of the evil principle alongside the good or of the radical evil in human nature.” But also in the first pages of the text this preference for the evil moral nature is already clearly present. E.g.: “We call a human being evil, however, not because… ” (RiG 20, RwL 70).
most part, he only mentions the evil option at moments where he could just as well have mentioned the good or both. Thus he seems from the beginning to hint at the eventual outcome of the question for human moral nature, without making this explicit.

With this introduction to the issue of human moral nature we arrive immediately at a remarkable characteristic of this essay on radical evil. Kant admits openly that it may seem somewhat strange to speak at the same time of moral good and evil, and of a by nature. These terms seem to refer to two completely different ways of speaking, which may be labelled ethical and physical. Kant recognises the scandalous character of his combination of terms. He tries to remove the scandal immediately by translating the notion “nature” in terms of freedom. In this way he tries to fit it into his ethical theory. Yet something of the physical character of “nature” survives this translation: it is expressed in the term “innate.” Again Kant performs his ethical translation: he emphasises that “innate” does not mean that human beings are not the authors.

Why does Kant introduce these unethical notions while also wanting to maintain his ethical view? On the basis of what we know from the Critique of Practical Reason a discussion of something like a “moral nature” would not be expected — especially not if he suggests that it could be just as well evil as good. Kant’s ethical translation of the terms “by nature” and “innate” does not immediately convince the reader of the necessity and usefulness of these terms within an ethical framework. Thus, from the very first section one notices a tension in Kant’s text — a tension that Kant himself does not clarify. One wonders why he permits it. He does not explain why the question of human moral nature is so important. Nor does he reveal the source or the relevance of this question. In the following we must find out whether the tension caused by this question continues throughout the rest of the text, and if so, why.

3.3.2. The Argument for the Evil Moral Nature of Human Beings

The problematic character of the notion of a “moral nature” within an ethical context is subsequently affirmed in the problem of how the actual character of this nature can be determined. The moral character of acts is

113 “But lest anyone be scandalized by the expression nature, which would stand in direct contradiction to the predicates morally good or morally evil if taken to mean (as it usually does) the opposite of the ground of actions [arising] from freedom…” (RiG 20, 21, RwL 70).
determined by the maxim which leads to the act. The first subjective ground that precedes all particular acts is also a maxim. But precisely because it is a maxim it is inscrutable. It cannot be “any fact possibly given in experience,” for maxims cannot be observed. A maxim is adopted freely; otherwise we could not be responsible for it. Hence, every maxim has its ground in another maxim, which is also freely adopted. An investigation into the first ground of all maxims — i.e. into human moral nature — would thus mean a process of tracing maxims back to their preceding maxim and so on into infinity. In this way Kant recognises the inscrutable character of the subjective ground. This argument corresponds to the ethical principles of the Critique. Immediately after this recognition, however, he remarks unexpectedly:

However, that by the “human being” of whom we say that he is good or evil by nature we are entitled to understand not individuals (for otherwise one human being could be assumed to be good, and another evil, by nature) but the whole species, this can only be demonstrated later on if it transpires from anthropological research that the grounds that justify us in attributing one of these two characters to a human being as innate are of such a nature that there is no cause for exempting anyone from it, and that the character therefore applies to the species.

With these references to “demonstration” and “anthropological research” we suddenly seem to enter an area wholly different from that of inscrutability. How should we understand these seemingly contradictory expressions? Is the judgement about the moral character of human beings impossible because it is not given in experience or can it be known precisely on the basis of “empirical research”?

It is not clear whether Kant refers with his remark about “demonstration by anthropological research” to the continuation of his own argumentation in Part One. What we find subsequently in the first and second sections might be called anthropology, but it is not a demonstration in the sense of a carefully constructed line of reasoning leading to a clear conclusion. Kant seems to state rather than to demonstrate. He proceeds in elaborating the idea he had simply stated — and not demonstrated —
in the preface, i.e. that two principles or dispositions exist in human beings: a good one and an evil one.\textsuperscript{119} He claims that the original disposition (\textit{Anlage}) of human moral nature is directed at what is good.\textsuperscript{120} This original disposition to the good consists of three aspects: animality, humanity and personality. All these aspects are present in rudimentary form, which means that they still need to be appropriated. They can still be used in a bad way; the disposition to the good does not guarantee good behaviour. On the other hand, this disposition cannot be eradicated: it is a necessary possibility of human beings as such.

The evil principle, subsequently, is elaborated in the statement that human beings also have a contingent inclination (\textit{Hang}) toward evil, which is called a propensity.\textsuperscript{121} The status of this propensity is much less clear than that of the disposition to the good. Its meaning seems almost the same as that of the evil moral nature, as Kant defines it, as “the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination.”\textsuperscript{122} But we do not learn what Kant bases the existence of this propensity on. That seems strange, because the idea of a propensity to evil seems to require elucidation the most. The claim of an original goodness in human beings may perhaps be reconciled with the findings of the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}. It seems, for example, in line with the idea of the clarity and obviousness of the moral law in human beings. But the background of his statement regarding a propensity to evil is less clear and seems rather to contradict the ethical view of the \textit{Critique}. Nevertheless, Kant states it with the same force as the disposition to the good, without any clear demonstration.

Thus Kant arrives at what seems to be a kind of description of the moral disposition of human beings: they are characterised by an original disposition to good and an acquired propensity to evil.\textsuperscript{123} Still, on the

\textsuperscript{119} Kant asserts this idea in the title of Part One — “Concerning the indwelling of the evil principle alongside the good” — and, previously, in the final sentence of the first “Preface” we mentioned above (note 106).
\textsuperscript{120} This reasoning can be found in the first section: “Concerning the Original Predisposition to Good in Human Nature” (RiG 26-28, RwL 74-76).
\textsuperscript{121} This claim is presented in the second section: “Concerning the Propensity to Evil in Human Nature” (RiG 29-32, RwL 76-79).
\textsuperscript{122} RiG 29, RwL 76.
\textsuperscript{123} RiG 29, RwL 76, 77. There seems to be this hierarchy of “original” and “acquired” between the two principles. At the end of the second section, however, Kant seems to undo this idea. There he states that, when compared with evil actions, the propensity to evil should also be called innate, “because it cannot be eradicated” and because we are “incapable of assigning a further cause for why evil has corrupted the very highest maxim in us” (RiG 31, 32, RWL 79). Note that in the English translation the word “eradicated” is also used for the disposition to the good. This is perhaps a bit misleading as Kant uses
basis of the existence of both principles in human beings, one cannot yet make any conclusion regarding the actual moral character of human beings. This interpretation seems to be affirmed by the remark Kant makes after the presentation of the good and the evil dispositions:

It will be noted that the propensity to evil is here established [aufgestellt] (as regards actions) in the human being, even the best; and so it must be if it is to be proved [bewiesen] that the propensity to evil among human beings is universal, or, which here amounts to the same thing, that it is woven into human nature.

Obviously, the proof that the propensity to evil among human beings is universal has not yet been given so far in this second section. But in the rest of this section we do not find the proof or the conclusion concerning the actual moral nature of humans either.

Do we then find the proof and a conclusion in the third section? If we may rely on the title of this section, “The Human Being is by Nature Evil” Kant does actually arrive at a conclusion here. Moreover, the section ends with a careful confirmation that “what the Apostle says might indeed hold true of human beings universally, ‘There is no distinction here, they are all under sin — there is none righteous (in the spirit of the law), no not one.’” However, in the note that clarifies this apostolic “sentence of condemnation,” he subsequently states that the “appropriate proof” (eigentliche Beweis) of this conclusion was already given. Yet, strangely enough, it was given “not in this section, but in the previous one,” i.e., in the second section. It is not clear as to what Kant means by this remark that the proof had already been given in the second section, for there we find only statements concerning the possible nature and no proof of the actual nature. It is at least remarkable that Kant has to alert his readers to this proof. Apparently, it was not that obvious; he seems afraid the reader would mistake the reasoning of the

different verbs for the disposition to the good and the propensity to evil respectively. With respect to the disposition to the good, he uses the verb vertilgen (RiG 28, RwL 76), whereas he uses the phrases “nicht ausgerottet werden kann” in connection with the propensity to evil (RiG 31, RwL 79).

This interpretation also seems to be confirmed by the note at the beginning of section two in which Kant says that the propensity is actually only a predisposition which becomes an inclination when the propensity is nourished or confirmed by experience (RiG 29, RwL 76). The propensity thus seems to be something which is not yet actualised.

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\[125\] RiG 30, RwL 79.

\[126\] RiG 39, RwL 85. See also p. 134, note 148 below.

\[127\] RiG 39n, RwL 85n.
third section for the appropriate proof. The third section, on the other hand, only contains:

the corroboration of the judgement through experience — though experience can never expose the root of evil in the supreme maxim of a free power of choice in relation to the law, for, as intelligible [intelligibile] deed, the maxim precedes all experience.\(^{128}\)

It is true that experience plays an important role in the third section. First, Kant argues that one arrives at the conclusion that human beings are evil by nature if “according to the cognition we have of the human being through experience, he cannot be judged otherwise.”\(^{129}\) Subsequently, Kant seems to arrive immediately at this judgment on the basis of experience:

We can spare ourselves the formal proof [Beweis] that there must be such a corrupt propensity rooted in the human being, in view of the multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human deeds parades before us.\(^{130}\)

Suddenly, the problem of the inscrutability of the subjective ground and the fact that it is not given in experience seem to be waved aside, because the experience of all the evil human beings do is telling enough.\(^{131}\) Although these examples may not count as proof, they do spare us the formal proof and make it possible, finally, to decide on the actual nature of human beings. After this Kant mentions some of these “woeful examples” from both “primitive” and present civilisations.\(^{132}\) And, finally, he argues that “experiential demonstrations [Erfahrungsbeweise] of the actual resistance in time of the human power of choice against the law” only establish the existence of the propensity to evil in human nature but not its real nature.\(^{133}\) Thus, experience functions as confirmation of the conclusion, proved earlier, that human beings are by nature evil. The status of the “experiential demonstration” is limited; it functions only as

\(^{128}\) RiG 39n, RwL 85n.

\(^{129}\) RiG 32, RwL 80, italics are mine. Here, Kant also characterises this evil in human beings for the first time as “radical,” without elucidating it in detail. Later on he will explain this term as expressing the fundamental character of the corruption of human nature, as it affects the ground of all maxims (RiG 37, RwL 83).

\(^{130}\) RiG 32, 33, RwL 80.

\(^{131}\) See p. 127 above (RiG 21, 22, RwL 71).

\(^{132}\) RiG 33-34, RwL 80-81. Cf. Kant’s remark right at the beginning of Part One, which says that the idea of a progress of the world is false at least as regards morality. The advocates of this view “have not drawn this view from experience, for the history of all times attests far too powerfully against it” (RiG 20, RwL 69).

\(^{133}\) RiG 35, RwL 82.
corroboration. Still, it is the only proof we find. Is this then the “anthro-
	opological research” Kant announced at the beginning of Part One? It may be, but what argues against this interpretation is that the status of these experiential demonstrations remains ambivalent: they show us the “exis-
tence” of the propensity to evil but not the “real nature of that propensity or the ground of this resistance.”

Why is this distinction between existence and real nature or ground drawn? At first sight it is not clear what precisely Kant means by this real nature of the propensity and the ground of the resistance against the law. But just before he already referred to the “ground of evil.” He indicated that neither human sensuous nature nor a corruption of human reason can provide a ground for moral evil. If sensuous nature is taken to be the ground of evil, human beings are turned into animals that have no free-
dom so that evil could no longer be imputed to them. If a corruption of reason is regarded as the ground, one then forgets that the moral law is obvious to reason and turns human beings into diabolical beings. Thus the term “ground” seems to indicate the general explanation for the resistance to the moral law in human beings. The two ideas mentioned cannot explain this resistance because they do not take into account that it is a matter of freedom. What, then, is the ground of the propensity to evil — as distinct from its mere existence? To answer this question one can only base oneself on a priori knowledge, inferred “from the concept of evil … as possible according to the laws of freedom.” Thus, Kant seems to make a distinction between the existence of the propensity to evil, which can be established by experiential demonstrations, and the ground of this propensity, which can only be cognised a priori.

What does this a priori knowledge from the concept of evil comprise? It explains first that the moral law is obvious for human beings. But, because of their sensuous nature, they also possess other incentives. If they let their will be determined by one of these incentives and relegate the moral law to a secondary position they are morally evil. The acts that follow from this maxim may be “in conformity with the law.” But, in fact, they are evil because the moral law is not accepted as the highest maxim. The difference between a good and an evil human being lies thus in the order of the maxims that determine their willing. All this sounds

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134 RiG 35, RwL 82.
135 RiG 35, RwL 81, 82.
136 RiG 35, RwL 82.
137 RiG 36, RwL 83.
138 RiG 36, RwL 83.
familiar on the basis of what we know from the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In the *Critique* however, this reversal of the right order of maxims had not been formulated in terms of a universal human propensity. The ethical reasoning just mentioned does not seem to clarify anything as regards the ground of the evil nature of human beings in general or as regards the propensity to evil. It only explains individual human good or evil.

However, Kant continues by applying this ethical knowledge to the idea of a propensity to evil. He argues that if such a propensity lies in human nature it must have the following four characteristics. The propensity is, first, natural and, second, moral, i.e. freely adopted. Third, it is radical, as it corrupts human morality at its foundation. Therefore, it does not leave human beings any good maxims of the same basic character and strength to fight the evil propensity. And yet, Kant concludes, fourth, that it “equally must be possible to overcome this evil, for it is found in the human being acting freely.” All these characteristics seem compatible with the a priori knowledge of evil. They reiterate that evil is a matter of freedom and thus never insuperable, but it is still radical since it favours other maxims above the moral law. Nonetheless, the idea of a propensity to evil that characterises human beings as a species goes further than individual evil. This “extra” is not explained by the ethical elucidations. Moreover, it seems difficult to relate this a priori, ethical explanation to the earlier experiential demonstration of the existence of the propensity to evil. What is the status of this demonstration? We do not seem to have come any closer to an answer to the question of the moral nature of human beings. Kant’s argumentation seems to follow different tracks. Moreover, he withdraws into his familiar ethical basis at the moment one expects him to go further. The a priori knowledge does not make us any wiser regarding the propensity to evil.

Still, this withdrawal into ethical language is not definitive. For after the statement of the four characteristics Kant suddenly calls the propensity to evil an “innate guilt (reatus) which is detectable as early as the first manifestation of the exercise of freedom in the human being.” He has

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139 RiG 37, RwL 83. Here Kant speaks again conditionally, as if the propensity had not yet been established.

140 This is the first explanation of the term “radical” in the text; see also pp. 100, 101, and note 129 above.

141 This fourth conclusion is posited here suddenly, without any introduction, and Kant elaborates this conception only in the last section, the “General Remark.”

142 RiG 38, RwL 84.
used the characterisation “innate” before. But the term “guilt” had not yet been used in this context. What is more, Kant gives the Latin equivalent of this term, *reatus*, which is a technical term from the field of theology or, more precisely, dogmatics. In the rest of the book Kant continues to use the term “guilt.” He uses it almost exclusively as a denotation of the radical evil nature, the subjective ground that underlies our actual moral decisions. The deliverance from guilt, subsequently, is something that Kant considers as well. Thus, this presence of the term “innate guilt” marks a turn to a more explicitly religious vocabulary which Kant will keep using in the next sections. Moreover, the term seems to evoke a different atmosphere from the ethical one.

However, for the moment, this change in vocabulary does not really seem to mean a substantial change. He continues with the discussion of an example of deliberate guilt: dishonesty. This deliberate overthrow of the moral law occurs when people deceive themselves by seeing the outcome as determinative for the moral quality of their thoughts and deeds. In these situations, they do not try to decide to have the disposition to act in this way but want to ease their conscience by just looking at the results. We seem to have arrived again on familiar ethical ground. But then, suddenly, Kant returns to his proper theme when he argues as follows:

> [this dishonesty] rests on the radical evil in human nature which (inasmuch as it puts out of tune the moral ability to judge what to think of a human being, and renders any imputability entirely uncertain, whether internal or external) constitutes the foul stain of our species — and so long as we do not remove it, it hinders the germ of good from developing as it otherwise would.

This remark seems to presuppose again that the actual moral nature of human beings is evil. The way Kant ends this section is in line with this. He quotes a statement from an “English Member of Parliament:” “Every

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143 *Reatus* is the dogmatic term for the situation of liability, i.e. imputation of guilt and the condemnation to punishment which is the result of sin (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Primarily from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1989) 258). Cf. also Heinrich Heppe *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen, Kreis Moers 1935) 255, 264. Note, however, that this dogmatics is not based on Lutheran theology specifically.

144 E.g., RiG 76, 116, RwL 116, 147.

145 RiG 38, RwL 84, 85.

146 RiG 38, RwL 85.
man has his price, for which he sells himself.”\textsuperscript{147} Next, he argues that, if this is true, then “what the Apostle says might indeed hold true of human beings universally, ‘There is no distinction here, they are all under sin — there is none righteous (in the spirit of the law), no, not one.’”\textsuperscript{148} With this statement the section ends.

This final statement seems to indicate Kant’s conclusion regarding human moral nature. But how he proves it remains obscure. We do not even know what would count as proof. For the arguments from experience were not valid as such and the a priori knowledge only clarified individual evil, not a general propensity. Thus, one observes that the tension evoked by the introduction of the notion of a “moral nature” within an ethical context increases in the argumentation concerning the proof for it. Kant sticks both to his ethical argumentation and to the idea that human moral nature is evil. But he does not reconcile these two lines of argument. The references to experience seem to be an attempt to do this; but they fail from the outset, as experience can never function as proof for a free ground of our acting. Kant’s text is an amalgam of remarks concerning human dispositions, experiences with evil behaviour, ethical clarification of evil acting and statements concerning the evil moral nature of humans. It is remarkable that Kant’s text has this shape. Why does he permit this obscurity and these tensions? We will try to find further explanations for this approach in the remaining sections.

\subsection*{3.3.3. Innate Evil and its Relation to Religion}

The appearance of the term \textit{reatus} or “innate guilt” and the quotation from the apostle Paul are the first explicit references to religion in Part One, apart from the first sentence. Thus, the greater part of this essay does not show any explicit link with religion — which is remarkable for an investigation into rational religion. However, after these first two references in the third section religion becomes more prominent in Kant’s reasoning. The last two sections go into religious themes like original sin, the story of the Garden of Eden, grace and supernatural co-operation. These sections may therefore provide an answer to our question of the relation between

\textsuperscript{147} RiG 38, RwL 85. This statement is attributed to Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742.

\textsuperscript{148} RiG 39, RwL 85. This is a reference to Romans 3:9-10. See also p. 129, note 126 above.
the theme of radical evil and religion. So far, we have not discovered any indicators as to how they relate. We have only observed that the theme of human moral nature, especially the fact of its being evil, causes tensions and obscure argumentation. But the reasons for Kant’s discussion of this theme remain invisible. What light does the explicit discussion of religious themes in the last two sections throw on these issues?

Kant refers to the doctrine of original sin in his discussion of the issue of the “origin of evil in human nature.” In distinction from that concerning the ground of the human propensity to evil, this question concerns the first cause of evil. Kant introduces the doctrine as follows:

Whatever the nature, however, of the origin of moral evil in the human being, of all the ways of representing its spread and propagation through the members of our species and in all generations, the most inappropriate is surely to imagine it as having come to us by way of inheritance from our first parents.  

The subsequent discussion of this idea of inheritance may be seen as an example of the application of the method Kant announced in the introduction: i.e. holding fragments of historical religion up to moral concepts in order to find out whether they belong to rational religion. This particular fragment, however, receives hardly any elaboration. As the extremely brief summarising formulation above already shows, original sin is not part of rational religion at all. Kant rejects the view that evil is something we have inherited from our first ancestors. This notion is problematic because it traces the origin of evil to some concrete event in time. This event is the cause of defiled human nature. But such an “origin according to time” is contrary to the idea of free actions. And, as we have seen, the moral nature of human beings is based on a free decision. Therefore this idea of inheritance is the most inappropriate of all possible representations of the first cause of human evil.

Subsequently, in opposition to this Kant introduces a different kind of religious “fragment,” i.e. “the mode of representation which the Scriptures use to depict the origin of evil.” They represent this origin in a narrative about the first human couple and the first sin. Why is this mode of representation better than that of the notion of inheritance? Because the first sin is clearly depicted as committed in a state of innocence.

149 RiG 40, RwL 86.
150 RiG 41, RwL 87.
151 Note the similarity to Ricœur’s interpretation of this biblical story; see also p. 103, note 21 above.
It consists of a transgression of the moral law: other incentives are thought to be more important than the law. The first human beings are fully responsible for this transgression; they acted freely. Thus, according to Kant, it is a story about each of us: "this is what we do daily." In this reasoning we see how morality functions as criterion for rational religion: the idea of inheritance fails the test, whereas the biblical story of the fall passes it. One should note however, that the biblical fragment follows an ethical account which corrects the idea of inheritance. Thus, Kant does not radically take his starting point in religious fragments; rather he seems to select a religious fragment that he can interpret according to his ethical line of reasoning.

However, does the story of the fall not also depict an origin of evil in time, which is contrary to its free character? Kant recognises that this may seem to be the case. But we should not read the narrative like that. We prefer to speak in terms of an origin in time to explain the propensity to evil as contingent. The biblical story may be interpreted as giving in to our "weakness" in wanting to speak this way. But if the narrative is then only about our daily sinning, what does it reveal as to issue of this section, the origin of the propensity to evil? Kant argues that the notion of an origin in time is not the only possible interpretation of the idea of an origin. There is also the notion of an origin in reason. This notion concerns the cause of the existence (Dasein) of evil, while the origin in time has to do with its occurrence (Geschehen). This may seem to be a hopeful way out of the problem of the origin. Yet Kant subsequently concludes that this rational origin does not turn out to be very helpful in explaining the human propensity to evil. For "the rational origin of … this propensity to evil remains inexplicable to us." Given that all human beings have an original disposition to the good and that evil must be imputed to them, we cannot understand why human beings accept an evil maxim. Here, again, Kant is positive about the way the biblical narrative expresses this insight. Kant argues that the narrative expresses the inscrutability of the origin of evil by placing it in a non-human being that tempts the first human beings. Thus, the origin of evil
is transposed to a sphere outside of humanity, which aptly expresses our ignorance on this point. With this statement of the inexplicability the discussion of the issue of the origin of evil ends.

What does the discussion of these religious fragments reveal? It is intended to correct the interpretation of the human propensity to evil in terms of inheritance. The evil moral nature of human beings must not be explained as the result of an original event in time. Apparently, Kant thought this misinterpretation possible. Over against this view he emphasises again that evil is always a freely committed act. Evil should be regarded as committed in a state of innocence. That the idea that human beings are characterised by a propensity to evil goes further than the notion of a single evil act is not a point of interest for him. The status of the propensity remains obscure. At times Kant seems to presuppose it and at other times leaves the issue undecided. So far, the religious fragments do not reveal why the theme of the evil moral nature is fundamental for an investigation into rational religion. Rather, they serve to underscore Kant’s general ethical argument.

There is another aspect that Kant values in the biblical narrative of the fall, i.e. that these human beings commit evil “only” because they are tempted. This means that they are not fundamentally corrupted. From this Kant concludes the following:

And so for the human being, who despite a corrupted heart yet always professes a good will, there still remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed.156

This remark reminds us of an important aspect of Ricœur’s view of evil: the hope for the good in spite of evil, which is founded on the idea of a primordial goodness in human beings.157

We find similar expressions of this hope in the final section of the essay on radical evil. Under the title “Concerning the restoration to its power of the original predisposition to the good” Kant discusses the “effects of grace” (Gnadewirkungen).158 This is the first of four parerga,
topics that border on the religion of pure reason but cannot be included within it.\footnote{These topics are dealt with in the “General Remarks” that conclude each of the four parts of the \textit{Religion}. The other ones deal with miracles (2), mysteries (3) and means of grace (4).} It is remarkable that Kant argues explicitly that these ideas cannot be part of rational religion — as they cannot be incorporated into our maxims — but nevertheless deals with them. What is the function of this discussion? As regards the first \textit{parergon}, the theme of the effects of grace enables Kant to take up the topic of the restoration to the good in spite of evil. This seems to be a moral translation of the theological notion of grace; it is the point where historical religion and rational religion meet. Subsequently, this section deals mainly with the moral question of “becoming good.” To this moral question Kant relates the religious idea of some help or “higher assistance” in this restoration.\footnote{RiG 45, RwL 90. Note that Kant does not reject this idea of “higher assistance” here.} Kant does not deny the possibility of a supernatural co-operation in this process of becoming good. But this idea tries to convey that which is in fact incomprehensible; “all use of reason ceases precisely with it.”\footnote{RiG 44, RwL 89.} As we cannot know anything about it, we must focus on what human beings must do to make themselves worthy of this help.\footnote{RiG 47, RwL 92.} Only if supernatural co-operation is regarded as something that completes our own efforts to become good is it compatible with morality. Kant discusses the conditions for belief in supernatural co-operation but not the idea of such co-operation itself. Human beings can make themselves worthy of it only by a radical revolution in the disposition of the human being, a rebirth, a change of heart.\footnote{RiG 46, RwL 91.} That Kant speaks of a revolution goes, of course, back to the fundamental way he understands morality: all moral acts go back to a single subjective ground that is the moral nature of human beings. This ground has to be reversed if one is to change from an evil human being to a good one. This is a radical change, a change of heart. This is possible because the incentive to the good — i.e. respect for the moral law — is never lost.\footnote{RiG 47, RwL 92.} Human beings are not corrupted in the sense that the restoration to good is no longer possible. This restoration must be possible because the moral law demands it. And “duty commands nothing but what we can do.”\footnote{RiG 47, RwL 92. Cf. also RiG 45, RwL 90.}
Kant’s argument concerning the restoration to the good seems to be based entirely on moral principles. The restoration must be possible because the moral law demands it and because human beings cannot lose their respect for this law. Yet one should note that this whole issue of restoration takes for granted that human beings are evil. Until this final section, this conclusion was surrounded with conditional formulations and obscure argumentation. But here it is clearly presupposed. If human beings were not seen as evil, restoration to the good would not be an issue. Moreover, because this restoration is of a radical character the evil in question must also be radical. What is implied in the notion of the restoration to the good is thus that human beings are by nature evil, i.e. that they, as a species, have an evil subjective ground which determines their exercise of freedom. Kant himself draws attention to the problematic character of a restoration to the good if human beings are “naturally evil” or “corrupt in the very ground of their maxims.” His central argument for the possibility of restoration is that the moral law commands that we be good and, thus, that it must be possible in spite of our radical corruption. Moreover, he argues that the restoration from evil to good is no less inconceivable than the fall from good into evil. It “surpasses every concept of ours.” Still, that we as human beings have no insight into how this is possible does not mean that the “thesis of innate corruption” is “opposed to the possibility of this restoration itself.”

To explain this Kant assigns to the “thesis of innate evil” a specific range of validity:

The thesis of innate evil is of no use in moral dogmatics, for the precepts of the latter would include the very same duties, and retain the same force, whether there is in us an innate propensity to transgression or not. In moral discipline [Ascetik], however, the thesis means more, yet not more than this: We cannot start out in the ethical training of our conatural moral predisposition to the good with an innocence which is natural to us but must rather begin from the presupposition of a depravity of our power of choice in adopting maxims contrary to the original ethical predisposition; and, since the propensity to this [depravity] is inextirpable, with unremitting counter-action against it.

This distinction between moral dogmatics and discipline (Ascetik) appears suddenly. It seems to confirm the reasons we discovered for the absence
of evil in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. As a work concerned with moral dogmatics, the *Critique* is interested in what counts as duty, not in whether it is carried out or not. Still, Kant did not argue previously that the discussion of the evil moral nature of human beings took place in the area of moral discipline. He emphasised the primacy of duty and freedom over against the idea of an innate evil and did not argue that these notions belong to different areas of moral investigation. One may thus wonder whether this distinction actually applies to the entire foregoing part. Moreover, in the rest of the book the issue of the restoration to the good remains a central theme. Thus the area of moral discipline should not be construed too narrowly: the investigation into rational religion is also related to it. For this area the thesis of innate evil is apparently relevant.

We should emphasise once more what was mentioned in passing above: the fact that this notion of restoration is so important also for the rest of the book. The question of how the good principle may reign over the evil one turns out to be the central topic of the rest of the book. Religious themes like the person being wholly agreeable to God, the kingdom of God, the church, the service etc. are all related to this central question. This implies that the idea of the evil moral nature of human beings is also very important for the rest of the book. The essential issue of a rational religion is thus the question of how human beings may become good in spite of their evil moral nature. This means, however, that the problem of the moral nature of human beings is from the outset a religious problem. Kant must deal with this in order to arrive at the central theme of restoration to the good. From the outset Kant tends to fill in the moral nature as evil. He hardly discusses the option of a good moral nature of human beings. This view of human beings may also be called religious because it is based on what Kant regards as the essence of religion.172

172 In an article on Kant's radical evil Emil Fackenheim argues that Kant introduces the notion of radical evil in order to give a complete and adequate justification of moral freedom (Emil, L. Fackenheim, "Kant and Radical Evil," in: *University of Toronto Quarterly* 4 (1954) 339-353, here 340). In his writings before *Religion* Kant regards freedom as the will that is determined by the moral law, i.e. free from the domination of other incentives. This is, however, a very problematic conception of freedom because it denies the possibility of an evil will. In the essay on radical evil Kant leaves this view of freedom behind and introduces the idea of the freedom to choose between good and evil. In order to explain, subsequently, why human beings are able to choose evil one has to accept radical evil in human beings. Evil acts are the result of an evil maxim. As we find no human being who does not commit evil, we must assume an evil ground in all human beings, i.e. a radical evil. In my view, it is difficult to prove this interpretation from the text. Kant’s text is concerned with much more than can be summarised in this clear and purely formal argument. Moreover, the role of experience is much more complex than
It is not difficult to give Christian expressions of this view. The idea of the human being as sinful before God is something we discovered in our analysis of Ricoeur to be central to a Judaeo-Christian confession of evil. This state of sinfulness goes further than single sinful acts. It characterises human beings as such. Kant’s discussion of the evil moral nature of human beings is now discovered to be related to and perhaps even inspired by these religious ideas.

Yet why does Kant not introduce the theme of this evil moral nature as a religious view of human beings? He presents the question of the human moral nature as a more or less self-evident moral issue. But this issue causes him a great deal of trouble subsequently. As we have seen above, he cannot incorporate it easily into his ethical framework as developed in the *Critique*. The question of human moral nature remains a strange and unethical issue within a mainly ethical line of reasoning. It is accompanied by terms like “innate,” “radical” and “natural” that are out of tune with Kant’s ethical vocabulary. Kant tries to put this right by translating them into ethical terms. But the terms nevertheless attract attention. We may now explain them as terms taken from a religious vocabulary. It remains remarkable that Kant is willing to accept great tensions and obscurity in his text in order to deal with the theme of moral nature in this way. But he apparently saw no other way to introduce it. The great risk of the theme of moral nature is, of course, that it suggests a certain determinism: that human beings are not entirely responsible for what they do because that is simply their nature. To avoid this misinterpretation Kant keeps hammering on freedom and responsibility for all acts. But he also wants to retain the idea of a moral nature, because it is central to a rational religion. Thus, tensions arise. We understand these tensions better now that we have discovered the religious nature of the issue of an evil human moral nature. An open recognition of the religious character of his starting point would also have been problematic, because that would spoil the rational character of his religion. However, in the end Kant cannot completely account for it in ethical terms either. It is doubtful that this theme remains within the limits of reason alone. Nevertheless, Kant chooses not to focus on these problems but to introduce the issue of an evil moral nature as a self-evident topic for rational religion.

Fackenheim makes it appear; it cannot count as direct proof for the evil moral nature of human beings. In addition, this interpretation does not explain why Kant introduces this conception of freedom precisely in his book on religion. Finally, I doubt whether one should really oppose these two conceptions of freedom in this way.
3.4. Radical Evil in a Reflective, Ethical Approach

We started the investigation into Kant’s essay on radical evil with the question of whether it is a continuation of his earlier ethical approach. As the topic of evil is hardly mentioned in the *Critique*, one becomes curious to know how Kant deals with it in his investigation into rational religion, which is also based on ethical principles. Does his ethical theory change under the influence of the theme of radical evil? Or does it largely remain the same so that the notion of radical evil remains a foreign element in it? It has become clear that the theme of radical evil is a new subject in comparison with the themes of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Moreover, the question of the moral nature of human beings is not easily incorporated into this earlier ethical approach: it causes tensions and obscurity. Still, the general framework of Kant’s reasoning remains largely ethical. He elaborates more on topics like the free character of the subjective ground, or evil as a reversal of the right order of maxims than on the propensity to evil or the evil moral nature of humans. On the other hand, through his discussion of this evil moral nature something changes in Kant’s ethical reflection. The issue is now regarded as relevant, whereas this was not the case in earlier reflections. But this change does not have any real lasting effect. In the end Kant withdraws time and again into his earlier ethical theory and leaves the issue of human moral nature unresolved. Thus, the idea of a radical evil in human beings remains a foreign element in Kant’s ethical thinking. It remains unclear as to how this idea may be reconciled with freedom and responsibility.

In his discussion Kant thus follows a two-track policy but does not reflect on this approach. His interest lies elsewhere. His ultimate aim in discussing the evil moral nature of humans is so that he can take up the problem of the restoration to the good. In this problem a human evil moral nature is presupposed but not important as such, on its own. That Kant focuses on the problem of the restoration to the good also entails, of course, a different orientation in his ethical reflection. We do not find it in this prominent form in the *Critique*. However, the theme of how to become good was not entirely absent from the *Critique*. Moreover, it is in line with Kant’s interest in what is morally correct. The evil moral nature of humans complicates this problem of becoming good. But we

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173 E.g. in relation to the discussion of the postulate of immortality. Immortality has to be postulated because we must assume an endless progress to the good in human beings (KpV 122, 123, CpR 238, 239).
have seen that Kant concentrates not on these complications but on the duty and the possibility of becoming good in spite of evil. This is in line with his earlier interests. Thus, radical evil remains a foreign element.

If radical evil is a foreign element within a mainly ethical line of reasoning, can we then still characterise Kant’s approach to evil as “ethical”? Indeed we can. It is precisely the essay on radical evil that reveals how important the ethical principles are for Kant in reflection on evil. He emphasises continuously that evil must always be understood as a free decision to favour other maxims above the moral law. He also approaches the issue of moral nature from this ethical perspective. That the ethical view conflicts subsequently with this issue does not mean that Kant’s approach is not ethical. Nor does the fact that the issue of moral evil is so little discussed in the second *Critique* mean that evil is not an ethical issue for Kant. The absence of evil here may be explained as a result of the specific aims of this ethical investigation. But that does not alter the fact that in Kant’s view evil should always be regarded as a matter of free, responsible acting. Beside this basic conviction the issue of the evil moral nature barely succeeds in securing a position of its own in Kant’s theory. Still, it does have a position — albeit a controversial one. The aspects of innateness, radicalness and naturalness also gain a place in Kant’s thinking. As they cannot completely be understood in ethical terms, they cause difficulties and tensions.

On the basis of what we discovered in Ricœur’s thinking these tensions need not surprise us. We may interpret them as a reflective expression of the ambiguity that is inherent in the theme of evil. We could even fit these tensions into the ethical-tragic distinction. The purely ethical side of human moral nature consists in that it is freely chosen, that it can be imputed, and that it can be overcome. The reverse side, on the other hand, is expressed by the qualifiers “innate,” “natural,” “rooted in,” “radical,” “subjectively necessary,” and “always already there, from our youth on.” These tragic elements can be observed in spite of the overall ethical context. With the help of Ricœur’s analysis we may thus gain a different perspective of the difficulties and inconsistencies in Kant’s approach to the theme of evil. We may even value them positively. Still, it is true that Kant’s mainly ethical argumentation makes it difficult for Kant to accommodate this ambiguity of evil.

Apart from this ethical character, Kant’s view was also introduced by pointing to its reflective, philosophical nature. And, on the basis of Ricœur’s findings, reflection seems risky. He observes that the primary expressions of evil are in symbolic language. It is difficult to preserve this
symbolic mode of expression at the level of reflection because reflection strives for clarity, univocality and knowledge.\textsuperscript{174} It is precisely the symbolic mode, however, that is able to express the ambiguity of approaches to evil. Thus, reflection has difficulties in taking into account an ambiguous view of evil. Can the observation of the difficulty of keeping together different views of evil within one argument in Kant’s text be linked to Ricoeur’s analysis? Are the difficulties we find in Kant’s text exemplary of reflective approaches? We should distinguish between the effects of Kant’s reflective, philosophical approach and the results of its mainly ethical character. Though it may in general be difficult for reflection to do justice to the ambiguity of evil, the difficulties in Kant’s text largely seem to be caused by the domination of the ethical view. This ethical view aims at a specific clarity and univocality as regards evil: it views evil as a free, responsible act. As we have seen, this view leaves little room for other approaches. The religious issue of the evil moral nature of human beings cannot be discussed openly within this ethical context. The origin and aim of this topic remain obscure in Kant’s text. Of course, for Kant the ethical and the rational come very close to each other where religion is concerned. Thus, one cannot neatly distinguish the reflective, rational character of Kant’s approach from the ethical. But it is clear that the practical rationality that is normative for Kant’s view of religion determines his approach and limits his scope. In this sense, one may speak of a certain one-sidedness to Kant’s dealing with evil. As a result, Kant cannot do justice to the absurd character of evil, i.e. that what is originally good in fact turns out to be evil. Because the radical character of evil cannot be fully acknowledged, the original disposition to the good remains dominant. Kant keeps emphasising that human beings know the moral law and are able to keep it. Only seldom does he point to the absurdity that evil is committed in spite of this original goodness.\textsuperscript{175} It is difficult to decide whether this one-sidedness is characteristic for reflective approaches to evil as such. Rather, Kant’s approach seems to be a very specific one.

Typical of this “specific approach” of Kant is also that the topic of evil receives elaborate attention only when he turns to the theme of religion. It is the study of religion that introduces a new theme into his thinking: the evil moral nature of human beings. This theme challenges Kant’s strictly ethical approach. Although Kant’s approach remains mainly ethical, the

\textsuperscript{174} See Chapter 2, pp. 91, 92.  
\textsuperscript{175} E.g. RiG 45, RwL 90.
introduction of this new topic also means a change in his thinking. Thus, the investigation into religion breaks Kant’s strictly ethical approach and opens it up for other non-ethical views. Moreover, in this context the topic of evil first becomes a separate, relevant theme. What may we conclude from this regarding the relation between religion and the theme of evil? It seems that the theme of evil is at home in the context of religion. Here it is viewed both from an ethical and from a tragic perspective. Yet, it does not really become clear from Kant’s text why this is so. Kant does not reflect upon this relation himself. The relation between evil and religion remains implicit in his reasoning. His interest lies with the relation between religion and the topic of the restoration to the good. Thus, another suggestion that follows from Kant’s text is that evil is important for religion as something from which we should be delivered. Evil is not as such important but only in relation to the hope that it will end. In the final chapter I will return to this suggestion and discuss it in detail.

Although Kant’s ethical approach displays a certain one-sidedness, it is also powerful in its revelation of the dangers of understanding evil in a tragic sense. He keeps hammering on the free character of evil deeds because he is afraid that the notion of something like an evil nature may affect responsibility for evil adversely. It is therefore interesting to analyse Jaspers’ approach next, in which the notion of “the tragic” is central. Moreover, Jaspers pays attention to what remains off-screen in Kant’s ethical view, i.e. the aspect of evil that is suffered. What kind of view of evil arises from this approach? In the following chapter we will explore Jaspers’ thinking on evil.
Chapter 4

Evil as Founderling:
Karl Jaspers' Tragic View of Evil

In 1935 Jaspers delivered a lecture entitled “Das radikal Böse bei Kant” (Radical Evil in Kant). Even a cursory glance at the article will make it clear that Jaspers’ aim in this article is not to criticise or attack Kant’s view of evil. Rather, he appreciates Kant’s view. Therefore, it may seem a bit strange to introduce, as I do here, Jaspers’ view of evil as one that differs from Kant’s. However, the abovementioned appreciative article provides a stimulating reason for investigating the precise relation between the two. It does not seem to be obvious that Jaspers feels affinity for Kant. The difference between the two is more conspicuous. First, Jaspers’ philosophy stems from the period after the end of German idealism, the end of the ideal of a “universal, total, systematic knowledge.” Second, Jaspers’ philosophy is called existentialist because of its interest in the appropriation of general reflection in the specific situation of the individual. He seems especially interested in the dark side of life: guilt, founderling, death, struggle, suffering. These intentions and interests seem

1 As regards the translations of Jaspers’ texts, I could locate a translation of only one of his books in English, i.e. Philosophical Faith and Revelation. For quotations from this book I will use this translation. For all other works I have made my own translations. The original German text will be quoted in the notes.

2 This is how Dufrenne and Ricœur describe German idealism: “savoir universel, total, systématique.” They point to the crisis of classical metaphysics in the form of German idealism as the primary characteristic of the philosophical context in which Jaspers’ philosophy should be placed (Mikel Dufrenne and Paul Ricœur, Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l’existence, op. cit., 20, 21).
to differ very much from Kant’s. Thus, Jaspers’ appreciative article on radical evil in Kant seems to present an interesting context for discovering the proper character of Jaspers’ approach to evil.

I suggested previously that this character of Jaspers’ approach might be described as tragic. The reason, however, for taking Jaspers’ view as an example of a tragic view — and thus as the counterpart of Kant’s ethical view — is not first of all this article on Kant but a later essay on tragic knowledge. In this essay the tragic turns out to be a theme that is connected to many important aspects of Jaspers’ own philosophy. In order to be able to note these similarities and evaluate them we need to go into the different passages in his work that deal with the theme of evil. Therefore, I will first analyse these passages and subsequently discuss the possible characterisation of Jaspers’ view as tragic. The number of passages that may be relevant in relation to the theme of evil is much larger than was the case in our study of Kant. As a result this chapter may convey the impression of being more disjointed than our discussion of Kant. Yet it will become clear that the different relevant fragments discuss the same central questions from different angles. Thus, the different passages will be related to one another in order to get a clear idea of Jaspers’ view of evil. As the starting point of this investigation we will look at his article on Kant. This article brings us directly to the heart of the matter, i.e. Jaspers’ own view of evil as over against that of Kant’s ethical approach. Moreover, because we are now familiar with Kant’s view, it should be possible to discover the proper character of Jaspers’ view precisely in his interpretation of Kant. However, in order to be able to understand central notions in this article, it is necessary to have some background knowledge of Jaspers and his way of thinking. I will give a short introduction first.

4.1. The General and the Historical in Jaspers’ Philosophy

The article on Kant was written as a lecture in the early nineteen-thirties, when Jaspers was a professor of philosophy in Heidelberg. In 1933 the National Socialists seized power. In a later commentary on his text
Jaspers indicated a connection between the subject of the lecture and this political situation. He writes:

In the situation of complete helplessness one could not speak directly on the matter, but indirectly. What was involved were my colleagues in Heidelberg and my occasional discussions there. Not evil as deviltry … but as the self-deceiving inversion of the conditional relationship between the will to happiness and moral claim: this was the basic appearance of the co-operation on the part of so many otherwise quite decent human beings. They wanted to be a part of it, justify it, because they received and increased their happiness, as they understood it, from participation in the regime, under the self-deceiving proviso of opposition in special cases. It was in this that I saw Kant’s radical evil and explained my own conduct. [For I discovered the reverse, radical evil, which belongs to human beings as such, at a decisive point in myself: I was guilty as well in standing passively aside because I wanted to survive.]4

I quote this passage first of all to indicate the different historical situation we enter by discussing the work of Karl Jaspers in comparison to that of Kant. It is, of course, impossible to discuss this situation in detail, but it is important at least to realise that there is a distance of a century and a half between the texts of Kant and those of Jaspers. We jump from the German Enlightenment to the time of German existentialism. Jaspers’ main philosophical work, his three-volume Philosophie, was published in 1932. During the ten years it took him to write this, Nazism developed into the most powerful force in German politics. After Jaspers had been dismissed from his teaching position at the university in 1937 and was banned from publishing in 1938, he was forced to live in isolation. The danger that he would not survive the war was real, also because Jaspers’ wife, Gertrud Mayer, was Jewish. But they did survive and in 1948 Jaspers left Germany. He was disappointed about the lack of real change in Germany after the war and accepted a professorship in Basel.5


5 In Basel Jaspers became a colleague of Karl Barth from 1948 until his retirement in 1961. Jaspers and Barth now and then discussed themes in which they were both interested, and also commented on each other’s work. As far as I know these debates and comments are not specifically concerned with the theme of evil.
Thus, Jaspers was a philosopher in a time that many people see as pre-eminently marked by evil. Jaspers seems to suggest much the same in the quoted remark.

The abovementioned passage shows that more than twenty years after writing the essay on Kant, Jaspers felt the need to reveal the historical background of that time. This suggests that this background is not clear from the essay itself. That is true. Jaspers reveals it only when he is later criticised for being “abstract” and “afar from the world.” Jaspers replies to this criticism by pointing to the historical situation. Subsequently, he emphasises that his apparently abstract ideas become concrete precisely through the act of philosophising. This debate on the abstract or concrete character of Jaspers’ philosophy points to a central aspect of his thinking that is also important for our investigation into evil: the relation between reflection or speculation and concrete reality or experience. Jaspers describes philosophising as a “historical” (geschichtlich) affair. By this he does not mean first of all that philosophers should take part in political discussions — although he does this in his explicitly political texts that deal primarily with the problems of post-war reconstruction. The historical character which he has in mind is to be achieved at a different, more fundamental, level. At the very beginning of his main work Jaspers characterises philosophy as “the way of the human being who historically (geschichtlich) grasps at Being (Sein) in his own time.” Philosophical questions are questions that rise in concrete situations, or, to use the first person as Jaspers does, in my situation. In my situation existence (Dasein) becomes questionable. I “wake up” and ask about Being (Sein). In my situation I ask the perennial questions of philosophy: “What is Being? Why is there something and not nothing? Who am I? What do I really want?”
It can be observed that Jaspers contrasts Being (Sein) with existence (Dasein). “Existence” is simply being there, without any reflection on one’s existence. It is “the reality that everything must enter so as to be real for us.” “Being,” however, is that which goes beyond mere existence. As such, it is not there as a specific form of Being, but it is potential Being. Being in relation to the individual person is called Existenz. Existenz is the possibility to become a self, which is only possible as a gift of transcendence. Transcendence may be called the objective form of Being, whereas Existenz is the subjective form. Jaspers calls Being as encompassing all these different forms das Umgreifende, “the Encompassing.” The task of all philosophy is, according to Jaspers, to appeal to the human capacity to reflect upon oneself and, thus, to become a self, or Existenz. However, philosophy cannot simply tell us the truth about ourselves. Rather, it illuminates Existenz (Existenzerhellung); it is the “thinking assurance” of the experience of Existenz. Philosophy can only try to point us in the right direction, to hint and to indicate what can only take place in human beings themselves in their own struggle for Existenz. It is in this struggle that we can develop historical consciousness (geschichtliches Bewußtsein). Jaspers is not referring here to the scientific discipline of history. My historicity (Geschichtlichkeit) is the “unity of myself with my existence as appearance;” to be inside this historicity is
“historical consciousness.”\textsuperscript{17} Only in my situation can I become myself: “Historicity is the only way in which Being is accessible to me, as a being in time.”\textsuperscript{18} Becoming Existenz is not a general theory of personal development, which philosophy can describe objectively. It is something we must perform in our own situation by enduring the tension between existence and Being. Only in existence can we become aware of that which transcends this existence, i.e. Being. Jaspers’ emphasis on the individual historical situation in which philosophical questions should be dealt with seems to be in line with the existentialist or existenzphilosophisch character of his philosophy.\textsuperscript{19}

However, as the reproach of abstraction already suggests, Jaspers also speaks in general terms, even though this seems contrary to his emphasis on historicity. As regards the philosophy of Existenz he argues that this is not an anti-rational movement but precisely the opposite: it aims at being “communicable in a thinking expression.”\textsuperscript{20} The character of his philosophising is very systematic. Jaspers warns against being too subjective in philosophising. In this respect Jaspers’ relation to two philosophers who have strongly influenced his thinking, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, is telling.\textsuperscript{21} Jaspers admires Kierkegaard and Nietzsche for the depth of their thinking and as “witnesses to Existenz.” But they are, in his view, exceptions, extraordinary persons. They remain loyal to themselves as exceptions and, therefore, they cannot be examples for us. They are, in a way, inaccessible to us, as we are not exceptions. Jaspers is not attempting to do this kind of philosophising, i.e. that of the exceptions, but general philosophising.\textsuperscript{22} And he wants to do so by dealing with Existenz in as clear and rational a way as possible. Clarity and rationality

\textsuperscript{17} “Diese Einheit meiner mit meinem Dasein als Erscheinung ist meine Geschichtlichkeit, ihrer inne zu sein, ist geschichtliches Bewußsein” (Phil. II, 121).

\textsuperscript{18} “Geschichtlichkeit ist für mich als Zeitdasein die einzige Weise, in der das absolute Sein mir zugänglich ist” (Phil. II, 122).

\textsuperscript{19} Existenzphilosophie — and not existentialism — is the term Jaspers uses for the philosophy of his time. Cf., e.g., the collection of three lectures entitled Existenzphilosophie (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co 1956).

\textsuperscript{20} “… die Philosophie, die man heute Existenzphilosophie nennt, [will] nicht eine der chaotischen, widervernünftigen Bewegungen sein ….” “Es soll in ihr … die Klarheit transcendent bezogenen Lebens wieder in denkendem Ausdruck mitteilbar werden ….” (Vernunft und Existenz; Groningen, Batavia: J.B. Wolters’ Uitgevers-maatschappij N.V. 1935) 93, 94; abbreviated below as VE).

\textsuperscript{21} I am relying on the information Dufrenne and Ricœur give in their book on Jaspers, with reference to Jaspers’ Vernunft und Existenz (Mikel Dufrenne and Paul Ricœur, Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l’existence, op. cit., 22-31).

\textsuperscript{22} “Philosophieren der Ausnahme,” “philosophieren des Allgemeinen” (VE 95).
Jaspers hints at this general character where he admits that “sich allgemeine Strukturen der Situation als Netzwerk einer Daseinsanalyse entwerfen lassen” (Phil. I, 3). Thus, we may observe a tension between the historical (geschichtlich) orientation of Jaspers’ philosophy and its objective or generalising style and systematic character.

This tension between the general and the historical in Jaspers’ thinking may be related to the problematic relation between reflection and experience that is important in our investigation into evil. At the beginning of this book I pointed out the problem of reflection on evil in taking experience into account. Ricœur’s reflections suggested subsequently that the gap between reflection and experience could be bridged by dealing with more primary expressions of evil that are closer to experience. On the basis of the analysis of these expressions the problem was expressed more precisely as not being able to take into account the absurd character of evil and the ambiguous character of expressions of evil. In Kant’s reflective account of evil we observed ambiguity: the mainly ethical line of reasoning was thwarted by other approaches. Still, these non-ethical elements could hardly be taken into account by Kant because of the strong emphasis on the ethical argument. Moreover, the radical character of evil was in the end overruled by the obviousness of the moral law. Thus, the absurd character of evil did not receive any place in his thinking. This discussion may receive a new impulse from Jaspers’ thinking. He emphasises that philosophy should be rational but also that it should be historical. It should be related to individual concrete situations. He seems to promote a philosophy that keeps close to experience. His interest in suffering and misery in addition to moral evil seems to affirm that he is interested in all kinds of experiences of evil. Thus, Jaspers’ reflective approach to evil may throw new light on our question of the problematic relation between reflection and the theme of evil. In his article on Kant this problem is highlighted immediately at the beginning. Let us turn to this article now.

4.2. Jaspers’ Interpretation of Kant’s Radical Evil

I remarked in passing that Jaspers’ article on Kant is appreciative of his notion of radical evil. What precisely does Jaspers value in Kant’s

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23 Jaspers hints at this general character where he admits that “sich allgemeine Strukturen der Situation als Netzwerk einer Daseinsanalyse entwerfen lassen” (Phil. I, 3).
approach? First of all, Jaspers values Kant’s formal approach to evil. He defends Kant on this point against the criticism of many interpreters. By the term “formal” Jaspers means that Kant does not connect the notion of radical evil to any specific object (Gegenstand). Radical evil is the inversion of the right order between the moral law and other incentives. This definition is formal and does not attach a specific substance to radical evil. Kant emphasises, according to Jaspers, that radical evil lies “in the depths of my reason, which precedes all particular forms of evil but which cannot be known once and for all in its concrete particularity.”

Radical evil is not an observable object that can be investigated empirically. Kant’s formal approach to evil is in line with his formal approach in ethics as such. Jaspers underlines the importance of the formal character of the moral law, the categorical imperative. Because of its formal or non-substantial character this law is unconditional; it is the “law of lawfulness.” Kant’s delineation of evil builds directly on this moral law.

But, why does Jaspers appreciate this formal approach? Would it not have been more in line with Jaspers’ attention to the historical to distrust Kant’s aim to formulate a universal moral law that is always and everywhere valid? This appreciation is possible because, in Jaspers’ view, it is precisely the formal approach that brings philosophy very close to our personal, historical situation in which we become Existenz. As regards evil, Jaspers observes this first in Kant’s refusal to objectify evil. The danger of conceiving of radical evil in concrete terms is that we turn evil into something harmless. In Jaspers’ view, this is what happens in many reflections on evil, e.g. when it is understood as a power in nature or is interpreted in a psychological or speculative metaphysical way. Moreover, if we delineate evil as an object — as that which hinders our happiness, as subconscious passions or as something necessary in a harmony of the whole — we absolve ourselves from any complicity in it. Kant’s formal approach to evil prevents us from turning evil into something simple and harmless and excusing ourselves. The formal moral law does not give us any concrete advice on what to do, allowing us to feel safe.

24 E.g. “Diese Kraft des Eindringens in meinen Ursprung haben die Gedanken allein durch reine Formalität” (Rad. Böse 133). “Kants Stärke ist, wo er in der reinen Formalität die Bewegung der Erhellung des Ursprungs vollzieht” (id.).

25 This argument is found Rad. Böse 112-114, 116-199, 121, 133-134.

26 “In der Tat liegt das radikal Böse in einer Tiefe meiner Vernunft, die alle bestimmten Weisen des Bösen erst hervorbringt, selbst aber in gegenständlicher Bestimmttheit nicht ein für allemal zu wissen ist” (Rad. Böse 112).


and supported by the law in our actions. It refers us back to ourselves, by asking “which world I would like to create through my actions.”

In the same way Kant’s view of evil as an inversion of the right order of maxims refers us back to ourselves. It does not tell us that this or that is evil but reveals evil as existing in ourselves. Thus, evil becomes a thorn (Stachel) that never allows us to feel safe or at peace. This thorn leads us back to the roots of our acting, to its origin. The origin or ground from which our actions spring is not an object about which we can think; it is the source of our willing. This is also the point — the only point — at which a change in our acting can begin. Thus it is precisely Kant’s formal interpretation of evil that leads us to this point, to the “ground through which I am myself,” to the origin of our “being ourselves” (Selbstsein).

This is the first reason for Jaspers’ appreciation of Kant.

From this formal approach a second characteristic follows that is valuable according to Jaspers, i.e. Kant’s recognition of the inscrutability of radical evil. In trying to understand evil reason reaches its boundaries. The recognition of these boundaries of our understanding of evil is the ultimate consequence of Kant’s formalism, the refusal to regard evil as a concrete object. This refusal sets in motion a process of illumination that leads us to the source, the origin of evil. But, in reaching this origin, we also come up against the boundaries of our comprehension. We need to think in terms of an origin of our acting, even though we cannot fully comprehend it. That does not mean that this thinking is invalid. On the contrary, according to Jaspers, the process of thinking in which we reach the boundaries of our comprehension is very important. For precisely “at the boundary springs that which brings forth our consciousness of Being.” At the boundaries of Kant’s illumination of reason, we have to

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30 “Vielmehr wird das Böse, indem es nur in mir selbst erhellt wird, zum Stachel, der keine Ruhe läßt und ständig den Menschen auf seine Wurzel zurückwirft, daß er sich nicht in Vordergründen verliere” (Rad. Böse 116; cf. also 133). Note that Jaspers uses the term “erhellt” for Kant’s analysis of evil — a term that he also uses to characterise his own philosophy (cf. note 16 above).
32 I use the word “boundary” and not the word “limit” because of its correspondence with the term “boundary situation.” This is the common English translation of the German term “Grenzsituation;” we will see below that this is a very important notion in Jaspers’ thinking.
33 “An der Grenze aber entspringt, was unser Seinsbewußtsein im Ganzen hervorbringt” (Rad. Böse 124).
The boundary of our comprehension is the point at which we may encounter the Encompassing (das Umgreifende) or transcendence (Transzendenz). This encounter with the Encompassing is, according to Jaspers, of vital importance in becoming a self, an Existenz.

The occurrence of terms like “the Encompassing” and “transcendence,” which are typical of Jaspers’ vocabulary, indicates that his interpretation of Kant comes here very close to his own philosophy. For this interpretation Jaspers seeks to find support in an important aspect of Kant’s thinking: the attention he pays to the boundaries of our thinking. He points out that because boundaries are so prominent in Kant’s project of the illumination of reason his philosophising “is always accompanied by mysteries (Rätsel).” Radical evil is one of the most essential of these mysteries. Jaspers briefly indicates two moments of incomprehensibility (Unbegreiflichkeit). First, we cannot comprehend where radical evil in ourselves comes from, what the cause is of the corruption of our highest maxim. We can say only that the ground of evil does not lie in our sensuous nature or in a corruption of our reason. Secondly, we cannot understand how a “revolution” from evil to good is possible for us, even though we need to assume that it is possible. At these points “radical evil makes us feel the boundary of our moral capacity.” By “moral capacity” Jaspers seems to refer to our capacity to think and illuminate
our moral nature. In his view, Kant rightly points out that this capacity is limited.

Many aspects of Jaspers’ interpretation that emphasises the formal character of Kant’s approach and his recognition of the inscrutability of evil sound familiar on the basis of my interpretation of Kant. But it is also obvious that Jaspers’ emphasis is different. Is this emphasis justified from the text? As regards the formal character of Kant’s approach, I have pointed out in my interpretation that this is the result of his aim to formulate a universal, binding morality. Jaspers hardly goes into this general aim of Kant’s ethics. Moreover, Kant does not seem to make a separate argument concerning the non-objective character of evil as Jaspers’ interpretation suggests. Kant argues that we always remain responsible for evil; hence, it cannot be caused by some natural characteristic but is always the result of a free decision. Thus, Kant would agree that evil should not be localised in some object outside or inside human beings. But he would ground this conviction in a completely ethical starting point. Jaspers scarcely looks at this general ethical argumentation, which is so important to understand the formal character of Kant’s view. Furthermore, Jaspers clearly reformulates Kant’s intentions in existential language when he argues that Kant wants to lead us to the origin of our acting in order that we may become a self. As regards the aspect of the inscrutability of evil, subsequently, Kant does mention this a few times. However, these remarks are part of a larger argument and do not constitute the main line of reasoning in Kant’s text. Jaspers seems to overstate these remarks when he summarises the aim of Kant’s text as pointing out that evil is a mystery. Moreover, he omits mentioning that Kant’s argument for the presence of radical evil in human beings is obscure and that the conclusion is not clear. Thus, Jaspers’ interpretation is not incompatible with Kant’s text but clearly has its own emphasis. It is precisely this that is significant for our inquiry into Jaspers’ own view of evil. So far, it seems that the inscrutability of evil, the danger of pretending to know evil, and the relation between evil and the experience of boundaries are important for Jaspers’ view.

Another striking aspect is Jaspers’ interpretation of the experience of the boundaries of reason as a moment in which transcendence may be discovered. This interpretation gives an answer to the difficult question of

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43 RiG 21n, 25, 43, 45, 47, 48, RwL 71n, 74, 88, 90, 92.
44 The inscrutability of evil is emphasised as a result of its free character and also in relation to the original disposition to the good. Cf. for a detailed argumentation my article “Thinking Less or Thinking Differently? Kant’s Enlightened View of Evil,” op. cit.
the relation between evil and religion in Kant’s text. According to Jaspers, “for Kant, the boundary of reason is the origin of that which in his thinking may still be called religion.”45 As I have already noted, this interpretation is accompanied by many terms that are typical of Jaspers’ vocabulary.46 He argues that beyond reason there is something else which is the real, the true, or in his terms: the Encompassing. This is, moreover, “the factual dominating power of Kantian thinking.”47 By turning the boundaries into a separate category Jaspers again clearly lays the emphasis on his own concerns, which differ from Kant’s. Of course, the notion of the boundaries of reason is important in Kant’s text. But to call these boundaries the origin of Kant’s religion is to pass over the ethical basis of Kant’s religion. For Kant, religion originates in morality. In this context we do find boundaries of knowledge: the ideas of God and immortality are postulates we cannot know but which we must nevertheless assume. But the only reason to assume these ideas is that they are necessarily related to the moral law. Jaspers does not clarify this in his interpretation. Moreover, to regard that which lies beyond reason as the dominant factor in Kant’s thinking is to ignore that, for Kant, reason is not “suited for this enlarged domain.”48 Religion can be discussed by philosophers only insofar as it is rational, i.e. remains within the boundaries of reason. Jaspers’ interpretation ignores Kant’s emphasis on staying within the boundaries of reason.49 Thus, Jaspers transforms Kant’s boundaries of

45 “Diese Grenze der Vernunft ist für Kant der Ursprung dessen, was bei ihm noch Religion heißen könnte” (Rad. Böse 127).
46 Jaspers makes the transition to his own vocabulary in the following clauses: “Religion ist ihm noch allumgreifend oder gar nicht. Sie ist in der gesamten Vernünftigkeit an allen Grenzen das, worin die sich auf sich selbst stellende Vernunft sich findet” (Rad. Böse 128, italics are mine). Another example of Jaspers’ interpretation in his own terms: “Die Unzulänglichkeit der reinen Vernunft, die sich ganz auf sich selbst allein stellen wollte, am radikal Bösen am abgründigsten fühlbar gemacht, bedeutet, sich mit ganzer Energie und ausschließlich seiner Vernünftigkeit anzuvertrauen, um nur durch sie an ihren Grenzen des umgreifenden Grundes inne zu werden” (Rad. Böse 132).
47 “Das Umgreifende des Philosophierens das an allen Grenzen der Vernunft auftaucht — das, wenn auch mißverständlich, selbst religiös genannt werden kann — ist dagegen die faktisch beherrschende Macht des Kantischen Denkens” (Rad. Böse 128). It is not entirely clear what Jaspers means by the remark in the subordinate clause. Perhaps he wants to point out that this Encompassing remains a philosophical entity and not a religious one.
48 Kant remarks this as regards the parerga to religion within the boundaries of reason (RiG 52, RwL 96; cf. Chapter 3, pp. 137, 138).
49 However, Jaspers’ interpretation itself is not unequivocal at this point. Elsewhere he underlines the importance of the emphasis on rationality for the discovery of that which goes beyond it: “Ist Kants philosophieren also ein Philosophieren der Vernunft, in dem die Vernunft sich umgriffen weiß von dem Andern, so doch nicht so, daß die Vernunft in
knowing into existential boundaries. For him, it is important to experience the boundaries of reason in order to become a self, to become Existenz. This means that religion is also interpreted in an existential way: the discovery of transcendence may lead to becoming a self. Kant’s rational religion centres around this discovery, in Jaspers’ view. In my analysis the issue of the restoration to the good turned out to be central in Kant’s rational religion. It is remarkable that Jaspers does not emphasise this ethical focus as it is so important in Kant’s understanding of religion. We may conclude that in his existential interpretation the ethical aspects clearly become less prominent.

Jaspers’ existential reformulation of Kant does not come as a complete surprise but seems to be in line with his philosophical approach as characterised above. The historical appropriation of general philosophical reflection is central to his thinking. In his interpretation of Kant we find this appropriation in the boundary experience that may result from reflection on evil. One should note that Jaspers does not relate this interpretation to specific experiences in “real life.” The boundary experience takes place in thinking, in philosophising. If we try to think of evil we are faced with the origin of our acting. We cannot understand this origin. In thinking of evil we thus have to recognise the boundaries of our knowledge. What is it that motivates this reflection on evil? Are there perhaps particular experiences that confront us with this question of where evil originates? Jaspers does not go into this. Neither does he display a specific interest in the passages in Kant’s text where Kant refers to experiences
of evil. Jaspers is interested in the experience that, in his view, is the result of Kant’s investigation into the origin of evil. This experience keeps us from locating evil in a particular object inside or outside ourselves. Perhaps this was what Jaspers saw taking place around him at the time of Nazi domination. But he does not refer to this explicitly in his article. On the basis of this text we may conclude that Jaspers’ interest in the historical does not so much mean attention for specific real life experiences but rather an interest in philosophy that may lead to becoming a self.

I introduced Jaspers’ reflection on evil as a possible example of a tragic view of evil. On the basis of this characterisation one would expect that Jaspers pays special attention to what may be called the tragic aspects in Kant’s essay on radical evil. We found these aspects where Kant emphasises the radical, innate or natural character of evil. Yet Jaspers does not seem to be particularly interested in these aspects. He even uses the expressions “radical evil” and “evil” as synonyms. Although he explains the qualification “radical” in line with Kant’s thinking, he does not incorporate this explanation into his further interpretation. He does not pay special attention to the general question of Kant’s essay on radical evil, i.e. that of the moral character of human nature, either. Thus, Jaspers does not analyse the tension between the ethical interpretation of evil and the tragic.

But does this mean that Jaspers simply agrees with Kant’s ethical view of evil? Jaspers does not raise the question of the meaning of the term “evil” explicitly in his article — he simply seems to take it over from Kant. Insofar as evil is for Jaspers also a free act for which we must accept responsibility the meaning seems to be ethical. Nevertheless, as I concluded above, the existential interpretation Jaspers advocates has consequences for this ethical character. By concentrating on the topic of the inscrutability of evil and interpreting this in an existential way Jaspers distracts our attention from Kant’s basic emphasis on the demand of the moral law and the question of whether we keep it or not. Moreover, Jaspers does not highlight the evil moral nature of human beings. Thus evil becomes less of a moral thorn, in spite of Jaspers’ remarks to the

52 We find these references to experience especially in section III of Part One (see Chapter 3, pp. 130-131).
53 The tragic view is expressed in terms like “innate,” “natural,” “rooted in,” “radical,” “subjectively necessary,” and “always already there, from our youth on” (see Chapter 3, p. 143).
54 Rad. Böse 111, 112.
Jaspers’ confrontation with the boundaries of our reason is less moral than Kant’s confrontation with our evil nature. One wonders whether for Jaspers a confrontation with the boundaries of reason motivated by something else than the inscrutability of evil could not just as well have served as a boundary experience in which we may discover transcendence. Does Jaspers’ interest lie with the boundary experience of evil in particular? He seems to assign a special place to it when he emphasises that radical evil is one of the most essential mysteries of Kantian thought. We will have to find out whether this is so. And if so, we must try to discover what kind of evil precisely Jaspers has in mind. Therefore, we will now turn to other texts that are relevant for our understanding of Jaspers’ view of evil.

4.3. Jaspers on Evil (das Böse)

If we want to examine whether the aspects of Jaspers’ view of evil that appear in his Kant interpretation are also characteristic of his view of evil in other works we should not analyse only passages in which the term “evil,” das Böse, is used. Other passages in which Jaspers does not explicitly use it seem to be relevant as well. For example, Jaspers discusses at several points the topic of boundary situations. He distinguishes between the situations of guilt, death, struggle and suffering. The theme of guilt is also prominent in other places in Jaspers’ philosophy. Themes like these also seem to be important for our investigation into Jaspers’ view of evil. Therefore, I will deal with these sections as well. Still, it is

Cf. note 30 above. I do not agree with Baumgarten’s criticism that in Jaspers’ article “Radical Evil takes on a significance quite surpassing in extent and import its significance in Kant” (“Radical Evil: Pro and Con,” in: The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 340; “Für und wider das radikale Böse,” in: Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 326). He attributes this misinterpretation to the influence of Kierkegaard’s thought on Jaspers’ work. But he does not specify at which points precisely Jaspers’ presentation surpasses that of Kant. As a general characterisation of Jaspers’ interpretation, it does not seem right, as Jaspers leaves out precisely that aspect of Kant’s notion of radical evil that is most important, i.e. that human beings are by nature evil.

Rad. Böse 125 (see note 37 above). Jaspers argues that the discovery of the Encompassing is, before the experience of evil, also present in two other moments of Kant’s philosophy: in the awareness of the “Erscheinungshaftigkeit” of all existence and in the notion of the highest good (Rad. Böse 129). But only in the illumination of radical evil does the “religiöse Ergriffenheit” become compelling: “Das radikalische Böse wird der Punkt, an dem sich Kants Religion in eigentlicher Tiefe entzündet” (Rad. Böse 129; cf. 134).

See section 4.4.1. below.
at least remarkable that Jaspers does not always use the term Böse when he discusses those related themes. We need to find out what this absence means. But first I will deal with texts that go into evil and use the term böse, or das Böse.

4.3.1. Ciphers of Evil

In *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* — his final great book — Jaspers discusses the theme of evil under the heading “Ciphers of the Existential Situation.”58 So far we have not come across the term “cipher” (Chiffer/Chiffre), even though it is a very important notion in Jaspers’ philosophy.59 Ciphers are the language of transcendence; it is by means of ciphers that it is possible to think and speak of transcendence. However, this is only possible for Existenz. The domain of the ciphers is the domain where Existenz and transcendence meet.60 In the ciphers Existenz is able to experience transcendence — not, however, in the sense of an object but as an immediately vanishing immanence.61 It can be grasped only momentarily by Existenz.62 In his final book Jaspers discusses the notion of the cipher most extensively. This is a result of the theme of the relation of philosophical faith to the historical religions that is central in this book. Here the ciphers are given more substance than in his earlier works and Jaspers is much clearer about which “things” can become ciphers.63

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58 PhGaO 309-384, PhFaR 203-255.
60 Mikel Dufrenne and Paul Ricoeur, *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l’existence*, op. cit., 286. Johannes Thysen poses the question of why ciphers are needed when transcendence is “already touched upon in ‘Existential’ decisions or in absolute consciousness” (“The Concept of ‘Foundering’ in Jaspers’ Philosophy,” in: *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., 297-335, here p. 309; “Der Begriff des Scheiterns bei Karl Jaspers,” in: *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., 285-322, here pp. 296, 297). The answer is clarifying: in these existential experiences transcendence is truly present in a way parallel to that of objectivity (Gegenständlichkeit), i.e. as the transparency of objectivity. This presence of transcendence in a quasi-objective form is required because Existenz is only possible in existence (Dasein).
62 Phil. III, 129.
63 Nevertheless, Jaspers’ notion of cipher has often been criticised for being too vague and enigmatic (cf. Salamun, *Karl Jaspers*, op. cit., 145).
Several dogmas of faith are tested as to their capacity to function as a cipher. Thus, he discusses the ciphers of the personal God, nature, the fall etc. The main distinction in the broad field of ciphers is that between ciphers that emphasise the objective side and those that stress the subjective side. In the ciphers of transcendence and immanence the stress falls on the objective side. Ciphers of transcendence are, for example, the different ways of speaking and thinking about God. Ciphers of immanence include those of nature, history and rational being or *logos*. The subjective side of the ciphers is emphasised in the “ciphers of the existential situation,” to which the theme of evil belongs.

Jaspers relates the theme of evil to the ciphers of the existential situation by the following short remark:

> We start now from boundary situations to which Existenz responds by illumination in ciphers. We might speak of ciphers in our view of death, in our views of law and love, in our understanding of sacrifice. I confine myself to the one theme of evil [ein Thema: das Unheil und das Böse].

First, we must take a look at the distinction Jaspers makes here between *Unheil* and *Böse*, which disappears in the English translation of both terms by the one term “evil.” The distinction corresponds with the traditional division of evil into physical evil (*Unheil*) and moral evil (*das Böse*): “One lies in nature, the other in human beings. One springs from blind necessity, the other from the freedom of seeing.” Jaspers seems to make a case for the distinction between these forms of evil when he argues: “By treating both alike we obscure our experience.” But he does not elaborate on this statement. Moreover, Jaspers does not stick to his own distinction but uses the terms interchangeably. Thus we

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64 PhGaO 309, PhFaR 203.
65 “Ich beschränke mich auf ein Thema: das Unheil und das Böse” (PhGaO 203, PhFaR 309).
66 “A look at das Unheil calls for a basic distinction between Übel and Böse. One lies in nature, the other in human beings. One springs from blind necessity, the other from the freedom of seeing (einer sehenden Freiheit)” (PhGaO 315, PhFaR 208). Note that here the term *Unheil* is used more broadly to include both Übel and Böse, whereas it was first used to express the (natural) counterpart to Böse (cf. also PhGaO 323, PhFaR 213). Jaspers also uses the terms Übel and Unheil as synonyms (PhGaO 362, PhFaR 239).
67 He adds a clause that reminds us of Kant: “if we ask about the roots of evil (Ursprung des Bösen) in human beings, we confuse our judgment by failing to distinguish human nature from the effects of our freedom” (PhGaO 315, PhFaR 208).
68 In the rest of this chapter on the ciphers of the existential situation Jaspers uses the term Böse in a way that comprises both physical and moral evil. This use occurs especially in section B. 2. vi, and in section C where Jaspers speaks about the origin of Böse, evil as a non-entity etc.
may conclude that this distinction between different forms of evil is not the main point of his investigation into the ciphers of the existential situation.

Jaspers begins his elaboration of “the one theme of das Unheil und das Böse” by “citing a few facts” from the enormous amount of examples of evil in nature and that caused by human beings. As examples of evil in nature, Jaspers mentions the cruel efficiency we observe in the struggle between eating and being eaten. Natural evil appears in illness, physical and mental. Among the evil that human beings do to themselves and to one another he includes things like atrocities in war that are not related to the political aims and the justification of violence by reference to God’s will or “historical necessity.” Besides, human acts are more often motivated by errors and delusions than by “critically clear knowledge.” And our free acts have bad consequences that are incalculable. All human things seem to be ambivalent.

Finally, Jaspers gathers all these different forms of evil together and argues that they all lead to what is called the condition humaine, i.e. the condition that a human being “can never fulfil himself truly and purely, never completely, never so as to leave him content.” It appears, for example, in the fact that our realisation of one finite possibility means that other possibilities and chances are lost. This realisation makes us guilty. The condition humaine is characterised by incomprehensibility: we can never grasp it completely. The precise relation between evil and this human condition, however, is not yet clear in the short “illumination” Jaspers gives here. It is discussed in the section on the “facts of evil,” but its meaning seems to be much broader than evil. What precisely is evil in this condition humaine? Or is it the wrong way of reacting to and dealing with this condition that is evil? Finally, Jaspers links the condition humaine to his notion of the boundary situation (Grenzsituation):

69 PhGaO 310, PhFaR 204. The first section of the chapter on the ciphers of existential situation is called “The Facts of Evil” (PhGaO 310-319, PhFaR 204-210).
70 “Die Schilderung des Unheils, des Übels und des Bösen, führen auf die in allem sich zeigende Grundsituation des Menschen: seit Pascal spricht man von der ‘condition humaine’” (PhGaO 315, PhFaR 208). Jaspers’ term for what is often called the condition humaine is Grundsituation, the fundamental situation or basic condition of human beings. I will use the term condition humaine because to me it seems to express more clearly what the issue is. As Jaspers himself notes, this basic condition is an important theme in this book: “Immer wieder ist von dieser Grundsituation in diesem Buch die Rede” (PhGaO 315, PhFaR 208). This line is left out in the English translation.
71 PhGaO 317, PhFaR 209.
72 PhGaO 315, PhFaR 208.
The *condition humaine* is a mode of the boundary situations — that is to say of human situations that are immutable, unlike situations in the world. We can neither avoid nor transcend them, but their shattering impact brings us to ourselves as possible Existenz.\(^{73}\)

In the quotation cited above Jaspers also presented the theme of evil as one of the boundary situations. These remarks confirm the connection between evil and boundary situations we discovered in the article on Kant. Thus, it seems that both evil and the *condition humaine* count as boundary situations. But the precise difference in meaning between evil and the *condition humaine* is not yet clear.

Subsequently, Jaspers chooses from the different boundary situations one on which he elaborates further: that of the inevitability of guilt.\(^{74}\) He deals with it under the title “Where Does Evil Come From?” It reminds us of the question of the origin of evil that is central in the article on Kant. There the origin was understood as the origin of all our acting, of freedom. Jaspers emphasised that this origin is inscrutable; it constitutes a boundary of our thinking. Here, however, in the context of his discussion of the ciphers Jaspers analyses different representations of this origin. He distinguishes between the origin of evil in human beings and its origin beyond human beings. This distinction corresponds to the one mentioned above between an origin in freedom and one in human nature.\(^{75}\) For his analysis of the roots of evil in freedom Jaspers relies heavily on Kant. He distinguishes four roots or principles of evil: self-will, reflective self-affirmation, the reversal of the right order of moral law and self-love, and seclusion.\(^{76}\) These should be understood as principles of a free will and not as the results of nature or given existence. Although these four roots of evil in free will are clarifying, they do not yet answer the questions concerning the grounds of our human misery. These questions push us beyond the roots in the freedom of human beings.\(^{77}\) This origin of evil beyond human beings is what actually interests Jaspers: the major part

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\(^{73}\) PhGaO 318, 319, PhFaR 210.

\(^{74}\) He briefly describes it as: “Human beings may choose to act or not to act; in either case they will be guilty” (PhGaO 319, PhFaR 210).

\(^{75}\) PhGaO 315, PhFaR 208. See notes 66, 67 above.

\(^{76}\) PhGaO 319-323, PhFaR 210-213. For the second and third form Jaspers refers explicitly to Kant and for the fourth to Kierkegaard.

\(^{77}\) PhGaO 323, PhFaR 213. In this section about the roots of evil as beyond human beings, Jaspers keeps using the term *Böse*, which shows that he is not consistent with his earlier distinction between *Unheil* and *Böse*, even though he sometimes mentions this distinction.
of the chapter is devoted to it. It is the domain of “human nature” where “blind necessity” rules.78

In accordance with his general theme of the relation of philosophical faith to the historical religions, Jaspers introduces different religious representations concerning the origin of evil beyond human beings. In a religious context the question is whether this origin may be imagined as a power that can be called to account. Can something or somebody be held responsible for the misery of our condition humaine? Jaspers considers how the different world religions deal with this question. He goes most extensively into Jewish and Christian ideas; in the Bible the question of the responsibility of God for the misery of human beings reaches a climax. The God of the Bible is one, is a person, the creator of the world who is righteous, loving, and almighty. This God can be called to account for what happens in his creation. He can be accused of acting unfairly. He can be held responsible for all the evil for which human beings do not seem to be responsible: the inevitability of guilt, suffering, the injustice of our world in which goodness does not correspond with happiness.79

The accusation of God is emphatically present in the story of Job, which Jaspers analyses in detail.80 Job calls God to account for all the suffering that happens to him and to others. According to Job, this suffering cannot be explained in terms of the retribution theory of the theologians, i.e. as God’s just punishment for immoral and lawless behaviour. But this rejection of an explanatory theory makes his misery even more difficult to understand. Faced with the incomprehensibility of his situation, Job turns to God in order to get at the truth. In his interpretation Jaspers focuses on the tension between Job’s longing for truth and the eventual absence of a solution or answer. Understanding suffering is not a matter of knowing. Nevertheless, we strive for understanding and this is important in Jaspers’ view. In the case of Job he sees this expressed in that God leads him “to a sphere where thinking does indeed cease, but in a luminosity that would be impossible except for the thoughts that have been overcome.”81 The ultimate origin of evil “beyond human beings” cannot be known. But in this process of discovering that we cannot know it we may become Existenz.82 This interpretation reminds us of Jaspers’
emphasis on the inscrutability of moral evil in the article on Kant. Apparently in both boundary situations, that of moral evil and suffering, we strive for comprehension and discover that we cannot gain knowledge or ultimate insight.

In relation to the questions that arise in the context of a religion with a personal God Jaspers discusses not only Job but also the doctrines of predestination and original sin. In these doctrines the issue of the inevitability of human guilt is more prominent. Jaspers’ interest lies with the experiences underlying the doctrine. He traces the doctrine of predestination back to the fundamental human experience of being both free and determined by the accidental conditions of one’s actual existence. This being determined is not just the opposite of being free. It reaches as far as freedom itself: within our free acts we also experience a determined side, a necessity. These are the experiences as different as that “I cannot do otherwise,” that “I am not free by my own means,” that “freedom carries with it responsibility and guilt.” Predestination relates these experiences to the will of God: God’s will is the cause of everything that happens. Again, Jaspers concentrates in his interpretation of this cipher on the dangers that lie in the knowledge that this doctrine is said to impart. Only as a cipher is this doctrine of value. The same approach can be observed as regards the story of the fall and the doctrine of original sin. In these ciphers as well Jaspers discerns the tension between freedom and necessity or inevitability. This tension is related to the experience that there is something fundamentally “out of joint” in us, something we cannot change in spite of our freedom. The simultaneity of freedom and necessity characterises the condition humaine. And this is what interests Jaspers: not freedom or nature as such, in some pure form, but their fusion. The tension of our human situation is something we should endure. The danger of doctrines like predestination or original sin is that they suggest that they impart knowledge. If they are seen as ciphers, on the other hand, they stimulate a struggle of questions and answers that never ends. In this struggle we become Existenz.

In Jaspers’ analysis of the different ciphers of the existential situation related to the theme of evil we can easily observe correspondences with the understanding of Jaspers’ view we gained from his article on Kant. The problematic character of knowledge regarding the origin of evil is prominent. It is expressed in a very moving way in the story of Job and

83 PhGaO 354-360, PhFaR 234-237.
84 PhGaO 361-367, PhFaR 239-243.
his search for a knowledge different from that of his theologian friends. In relation to the ciphers of predestination and original sin this problem is present in a different way. They reveal the danger of a solidified explanation: such explanations no longer stimulate us to ask questions, to struggle for truth and to recognise that we lack insight. Behind this view lies Jaspers’ emphasis on the historical and momentary character of knowledge. On the other hand, the analysis of the ciphers also challenges Jaspers to go more deeply into the notion of the origin of evil than he did in the article on Kant. It is remarkable that especially the origin of evil insofar as it does not lie in the freedom of human beings occupies his thinking at this point. Still, he emphasises that the experience of evil as something that is not in our power is possible only in relation to the experience of freedom. Precisely this experience of the necessity in a free act is what interests Jaspers.

Yet, as a result of this, evil seems to merge into a more general problem: that of the *condition humaine* which is characterised by tensions like that between freedom and necessity. These tensions are inevitable and cannot be resolved; they should be endured. Thus, one may wonder whether it is still meaningful to speak of evil here. Does Jaspers not in fact mean the inevitable human situation which is neither good nor evil? This question rose before, on the basis of Ricœur’s analysis of the tragic myth in the strict sense. In these myths evil does not actually seem to be in tension with a totality of meaning, with a good. It is inevitable and given with human existence as such. Thus one wonders whether the term “evil” is still appropriate. In general, Jaspers’ interpretation of the experiences behind the ciphers of predestination and original sin reminds us of the tragic myth with its emphasis on the character of evil as fated and the experience of necessity in freedom. Aspects expressed in the myth of the drama of creation and the myth of the exiled soul, however, are not easily recognised in Jaspers’ dealing with evil. The idea that evil is a power outside human beings that infects and seduces them does not appear in Jaspers’ discussion of ciphers of the origin of evil. His view of evil thus seems to come very close to that of tragedy. Nevertheless, he also pays attention to the origin of evil insofar as it lies in human freedom. The ethical is thus not entirely absent. But his attention for this aspect is very limited in comparison to the idea that evil has its roots beyond human beings. In order to clarify further the relation between this

85 See Chapter 2, p. 77.
ethic view of evil and its more tragic aspects I will finally turn to two passages in which evil is related to the will.

4.3.2. Ethical Views of Evil?

In the second volume of his Philosophie the theme of das Böse is found in a chapter on the will. Jaspers defines das Böse here as located in the will and nowhere else: “Only the will can be evil.”86 The “untrue,” “physical drives” or “the misery of existence” are not yet evil.87 They may become a vehicle of evil when I give my assent, when I will that they become evil. But they are not evil as such. This definition reminds us again of Kant’s view of evil in which the incentives that differ from the moral law are not evil as such but only become so when we adopt them as our highest maxim. Here, however, the point of reference is not, as with Kant, the moral law, but “possible Existenz.”

Evil is the will that turns against possible Existenz: it approves of the absolutisation of pure existence and realises this absolutisation as the ... will that only wills existence, without being able to fulfil it.88

The evil will means giving up freedom freely by denying Being and oneself. This definition of the evil will is more specific and overtly related to Existenz than in Jaspers’ article on Kant. It is the “will to nothing.”89 It is possible only by means of obscuring our willing, by not making it transparent to ourselves. Therefore, the evil will is inscrutable. Yet, it does not exist in this absolute sense in reality. Insofar, it is a “construction.”90 As a reality, it cannot truly be grasped or fixed. This means also that I can never be sure of having defeated evil: “self-satisfaction with one’s own goodness is impossible for the will in existence in time.”91 We saw this idea in the article on Kant as well. Jaspers relates it to the inconstancy of Existenz: Existenz is never something lasting but is always accompanied by the “ghostly double” (gespenstigen Doppelgänger) of

86 “Der Wille allein ist es, der böse sein kann” (Phil. II, 170).
87 “Auch das Unwahrre ist noch nicht das Böse, auch nicht das Triebhafte; auch nicht die Übel des Daseins, die es beschränken und vernichten” (Phil. II, 170).
88 “Böse ist der Wille, der sich gegen mögliche Existenz kehrt: er bejaht die Verabsolutierung des bloßen Daseins und verwirklicht sie als der ... Wille, der nur Dasein will, ohne es erfüllen zu können” (Phil. II, 171).
89 “Wille zum Nichts” (Phil. II, 171).
90 Phil. II, 172.
91 “... im Zeitdasein [ist] dem Willen die Selbstzufriedenheit mit dem eigenen Gutsein unmöglich” (Phil. II, 173).
evil. All “Being of freedom in existence” is marked by this “unalterable ambiguity.” Thus, although there are apparent ethical overtones in Jaspers’ “construction” of the evil will, it is finally traced back to the fundamental ambiguity of the condition humaine. Being Existenz is not a lasting state but something momentary because we are always also existence. It seems that one can distinguish different degrees of not being directed at Existenz of which the evil will is the most extreme. The evil will is thus a conscious act that turns a characteristic of human existence into its extreme.

A different ethical aspect is found in a short passage on das Böse in Von der Wahrheit. Here Jaspers delineates evil in relation to untruth: evil is conniving at untruth instead of overcoming it. Thus he focuses on the issue of responsibility. Human beings are responsible for what happens insofar as they could have known it. Responsibility is closely related to the value of truthfulness (Wahrhaftigkeit). This implies that we can recognise the “facts of evil.” This “fact of evil” is subsequently described only as an exercise of one’s will — and not, as in Philosophical Faith and Revelation, also as something in nature. As in the latter book, Jaspers distinguishes here between different stages in the evil will — culminating in the Eigenwille — and emphasises the danger of self-satisfaction. Instead, one should accept responsibility. This is not just responsibility for specific evil acts, however. Jaspers emphasises that we should accept responsibility for the guilt that is the result of our being alive — of building our life on the guilty history of our ancestors and of not taking action against the present evil.

In line with this focus on evil as something fundamentally wrong for which we are nevertheless responsible, Jaspers rejects the interpretations of evil as something perceptible, something objective. They turn evil into something harmless — something which he also stated in the article on Kant. Evil is more than the undesirable, the ineffective, or the improper. Again, he relates this difference to the inscrutability of the origin of evil.

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92 “Diese Rolle eines gespenstigen Doppelgängers geht durch alles Sein der Freiheit im Dasein als eine unauslöschliche Zweideutigkeit” (Phil. II, 174).
93 VdW 531-539.
94 “Zur Wahrhaftigkeit gehört das Anerkennen des Tatbestands des Bösen” (VdW 533).
95 VdW 532-536.
96 VdW 536.
97 VdW 537, 539.
98 “Keine Interpretation des Bösen kann dieses auf ein anderes zurückführen oder in ein Nichtseiendes auflösen. Ein uns unbegreiflicher Ursprung kommt hinzu, ein Etwas,
But he subsequently describes this inscrutability as a fundamental characteristic of our existence: evil originates from the fact that all forms of the Encompassing cannot be one. However, this must, again, not be understood as just a fact but as something in which we are involved: evil lies in our attitude towards the facts. We must recognise evil as something inscrutable for which we are nevertheless responsible. Not accepting this responsibility is also called evil. It is remarkable that the ethical term “responsibility,” which usually applies to things or acts that could have been otherwise, is broadened here to include things or situations that are inevitable. To this reformulation of responsibility seems to correspond the interpretation of evil as both something having to do with the will and something that belongs inevitably to human existence.

Thus, these two passages reveal how Jaspers uses ethical notions in such a way that they receive a more than ethical meaning. The evil will is related to the incapability of human beings to hold on to Existenz. Responsibility for evil means responsibility for the guilt attached to our human existence as such. This “more than ethical” may be called tragic: it shows evil as an inevitable characteristic of human existence. Jaspers does not only want to reveal this as some fundamental philosophical insight. It is something to which we should actively relate, something for which we should accept responsibility. The ethical moment in his dealing with evil thus seems to come very close to the moment of the historical appropriation of general philosophical views. One may wonder whether this interpretation is specific to the theme of evil or whether it does not apply to all aspects of human existence. However, Jaspers seems to assign a central place to the facts of evil. That is partly because here the danger of not accepting responsibility for it is acute. Moreover, these facts point to something which is very fundamental in human existence: the clash of existence and Being. Jaspers’ preoccupation with this conflict also appears in his analysis of the boundary situations. We will now turn to this aspect of his thinking. With the discussion of the theme of boundary situations we also arrive at the texts in which Jaspers does not explicitly mention the word “Böse” but nevertheless deals with similar themes.
4.4. Jaspers' Discussion of Themes Related to Evil

4.4.1. Boundary Situations

In our previous analysis it has become clear that the notion of the boundary situation is important in Jaspers' view of evil. Both in the article on Kant and in the section on the existential ciphers evil was presented as a boundary experience or situation. In the second volume of his Philosophie Jaspers devotes a separate chapter to this topic of the boundary situations.\(^{100}\) Here he discusses, among other things, the situations of death, suffering, struggle and guilt — phenomena that may also be referred to as evil. What precisely is a boundary situation? As regards the meaning of the term "boundary," the relation we discovered between boundaries and Being or transcendence turns out to be fundamental. Right from the beginning Jaspers defines the essence of the notion of a boundary as follows: "Boundary expresses: there is something other, but at the same time this other is not present for consciousness in existence."\(^{101}\) For Jaspers, "boundary" clearly does not just mean that things come to an end, break off. It means that things break off but thereby create the possibility of the appearance of something that differs from this finite existence. Here, Jaspers designates this different dimension most of the time simply by the term "Being."\(^{102}\) Boundary situations can only be experienced by Existenz. They are essential to it: "To experience boundary situations and to be Existenz is the same."\(^{103}\) This also means that they do not force themselves upon us. It is possible to ignore them or keep away from them, forget them.\(^{104}\) In order to experience them we must seize and appropriate specific factual situations and turn them into boundary situations.

\(^{100}\) Phil. II, 201-254. In his earlier work Psychologie der Weltanschauungen Jaspers also devotes a large passage to the topic of the boundary situations (PsW 229-285). The arrangement of this passage largely matches that of the chapter in his Philosophie, although there are some differences, e.g. the boundary situation of "chance" (Zufall) which is absent in Philosophie.

\(^{101}\) "Grenze drückt aus: es gibt ein anderes, aber zugleich, dies andere ist nicht für das Bewußsein im Dasein" (Phil. II, 203). Cf. Jaspers' indication of the proper function of the boundary: "…noch immanent zu sein und schon auf Transzendenz zu weisen" (Phil. II, 204).

\(^{102}\) The term "transcendence" is used less frequently in this text.

\(^{103}\) "Grenzsituationen erfahren und Existieren ist dasselbe" (Phil. II, 204).

\(^{104}\) For each different boundary situation Jaspers indicates which mechanisms can be developed to avoid them. For example, the boundary situation of struggle does not appear if one thinks that one can avoid struggle, or if, instead, struggle is extolled as such (Phil. II, 236-237).
Several times now we have come across the question of whether Jaspers relates the boundary situations to evil experiences in particular. May we not become Existenz also in happier or more beautiful experiences of boundaries, like love or communication? From the four single boundary situations of death, suffering, struggle and guilt Jaspers elaborates it is clear that he does not include pleasant situations among them. The boundary situations are depicted as something negative: they are like a "wall into which we bump, on which we founder." Why are they defined like this? To understand this, it is clarifying to take into account the structure of the chapter in Jaspers’ Philosophie. Here the different situations of death, suffering etc. are presented as “single boundary situations” (einzelle Grenzsituationen). These are distinguished from two less specific boundary situations with which Jaspers deals before and after the section on the single boundary situations. Thus the boundary situations are divided into three categories or stages. The first concerns the general experience that I am always, as a specific existence (Dasein), in a particular, limited situation, which differs for every individual. The single boundary situations, secondly, are inevitable events that happen to all human beings in their specific situation. Jaspers does not explain his choice of precisely the topics of death, suffering, struggle and guilt. The third stage, finally, is the perspective on existence that follows from these four single boundary situations. In this perspective existence as such becomes a boundary, insofar as we fundamentally doubt it and do not find peace in it. It is the awareness that all Being is historical (geschichtlich); it appears in existence. In our dealing with boundary situations we pass through these three stages: from the specific, finite historical to the infinite and absolute historical. Thus, the illumination of the specific boundary situations is embedded in an illumination of the historicity (Geschichtlichkeit) of our existence in general. It is the confrontation with historicity that interests Jaspers in the single boundary situations; they are pre-eminent expressions of this confrontation.

105 The theme of communication is one of the central themes of Jaspers’ work. Successful communication is one of the moments in which we become Existenz. Cf. e.g. the chapter on communication in Phil. II, 50-117.
106 “Sie sind wie eine Wand, an die wir stoßen, an der wir scheitern” (Phil. II, 203).
107 Phil. II, 201-254.
108 Phil. II, 209.
109 “Der Weg unserer Vergegenwärtigung der Grenzsituationen wird also von dem bestimmt und endlich Geschichtlichen der Existenz über die einzelnen Grenzsituationen aufsteigen zum unbestimmt und absolut Geschichtlichen, wie es in der universalen Grenzsituation allen Daseins fühlbar wird” (Phil. II, 210).
One does not find a detailed elaboration of the “facts” related to the single boundary situations or of the different ways to think and speak about these experiences. Jaspers determines in a general way how we may become 
Existenz in confrontation with them. He describes the mechanisms by means of which we can try to seclude ourselves from these situations and consciously avoid the possibility of becoming 
Existenz. In all the four different situations he emphasises that we must acknowledge them, that we must look them straight in the eye. This is a disquieting experience. It confronts us with the imperfection of our existence. But being 
Existenz is disquieting. As 
Existenz we experience life as broken, as marked by opposite forces that cannot be reconciled. Jaspers calls this brokenness the antinomic structure of existence.110 This means that existence as a whole cannot be completed (vollendet): the good always appears to be related to evil.111 Being appears only in existence and not as something objective apart from existence.112

Thus, it seems that precisely the experiences of death, guilt etc. reveal infinite Being in finite existence because they are signs of the brokenness and fundamental antinomy of existence. Because Jaspers sees the central problem of existence in our dealing with the conflict between Being and existence he is interested in the experiences in which this conflict pre-eminently appears: in death, suffering, struggle and guilt. In comparison to the article on Kant, it is remarkable that the experiences Jaspers mentions here as boundaries are not experiences in thinking but in “real life.” The problem of knowing and the danger of objectifying knowledge is not emphasised very much here. In line with what we observed in the other passages the boundary situations are traced back to the general problematic character of our condition humaine. They are not a separate, independent category: they only represent the inevitable and intense situations in which we are pre-eminently confronted with the antinomy between Being and existence.

4.4.2. Foundering (Scheitern)

Another theme that seems important to understand Jaspers’ view of evil is that of “foundering” (Scheitern). I did not pay separate attention to it, but in the texts we have dealt with so far the term appears frequently.

110 “Die Weise, wie das Dasein überall in den Grenzsituationen als in sich brüchig erscheint, ist seine antinomische Struktur” (Phil. II, 249).
111 E.g. Phil. II, 249, 250, 253.
It is characteristic of Jaspers’ style of philosophising that he uses several different words to indicate one and the same experience or notion. By approaching ideas from different angles he tries to account for their breadth in meaning — and thus also hopes to prevent the impression that his philosophy is meant as a description of a single, objective truth. In this way, Jaspers uses the term “foundering” as synonymous with that of boundary situations and the experience of the antinomic structure of existence. Throughout Jaspers’ work the term is used to indicate the fundamental experience of reaching the boundaries of our historical existence in knowing, acting, communicating etc.

In his Philosophie Jaspers also devotes a separate treatise to the theme of foundering. Here foundering seems to receive another meaning besides this general meaning of the failure of existence. Jaspers presents it here as a cipher, moreover, as the experience from which the awareness of the ciphers springs, as the “enclosing ground of all cipher-being.” What does Jaspers mean precisely by this cipher of foundering? He seems to distinguish it from experiences of ruin and failure in general. This distinction, however, is not very precise. The thrust of his argument seems to be that foundering as a cipher is foundering at the level of Existenz and not just in existence. For example, in my free awareness of Being I founder because I cannot be fully autonomous, not entire or complete, or because the truth that I discover at particular moments can never become generally valid. This “real foundering” must be distinguished from “factual foundering;” in factual foundering we must try to grasp real

113 Clear examples of this are Jaspers’ use of the words Being, transcendence, Encompassing and Unconditional as synonyms, and also that of the notions Existenz, self, being oneself.

114 The fourth part of the fourth chapter, on the language of the ciphers, is called: “Verschwinden von Dasein und Existenz als entscheidende Chiffre der Transzendenz (Sein im Scheitern)” (Phil. III, 219-237).

115 Cf. Thyssen’s remark that “in Jaspers’ explicit treatment of foundering towards the end of the work it takes on another sense or function [eine zweite Funktion]: foundering itself comes to be a cipher, a cipher determining all other ciphers” (“The Concept of ‘Foundering’ in Jaspers’ Philosophy,” in: The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 312; “Der Begriff des Scheiterns bei Karl Jaspers,” in: Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 299).


117 Cf. Thyssen’s remark that “Jaspers does not …give a complete list of all forms of foundering and then divide them carefully according to their meanings” (“The Concept of ‘Foundering’ in Jaspers’ Philosophy,” in: The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 318; “Der Begriff des Scheiterns bei Karl Jaspers,” in: Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 305, 306). Thyssen calls this way of handling the problem “labile” (id.). In my view, it is characteristic of Jaspers’ evocative style of writing in general.

118 Phil. III, 221.
foundering. Yet this must not be understood in the sense that we should strive to founder; precisely when we pursue it, we miss the real founders that reveals Being. Rather, I must build my life as something lasting, be active and expect everything of myself — while at the same time courageously daring (wagen) to founder. Then I can experience foundering as the fulfilled cipher of Being. It is not precisely clear whether this foundering as a cipher of Being is something different from the boundary situations in which we also encounter Being. But there seems to be at least one importance difference. It seems that Jaspers suggests that even in our efforts to deal with foundering as Existenz, in becoming Existenz, we may founder. This “ultimate foundering” seems to add an extra level to the notion of the boundary situations: foundering in encountering transcendence.

This new level of foundering does not only mean a deepening of the idea of the boundary situations but also a critique. Behind the idea that we may also founder in becoming Existenz lies the question of whether Being appears in all moments of foundering. Jaspers explicitly poses the problem of moments that cannot be interpreted, where every interpretation (Deutung) breaks off because they cannot be grasped as meaningful by human thought. He raises this problem after he has first gone into the necessary character of foundering. To the question of whether foundering is necessary for the appearance of Being in existence he gives four possible answers. In the first interpretation Jaspers argues that the truth of Being can never become lasting. Then it would be static, dead. Being is always moving towards foundering; at one moment truth is there, in

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119 “das faktische Scheitern,” “das echte/wahre Scheitern” (e.g. Phil. III, 219 (heading), 225).
120 “Die Chiffre enthüllt sich nicht, wenn ich sie will, sondern wenn ich alles tue, um ihre Wirklichkeit zu vermeiden” (Phil. III, 223).
121 Phil. III, 225.
122 Jaspers mentions the boundary situations in several places, at the one time carefully distinguishing them from the foundering of Existenz (Phil. III, 221) and at the other equating them (226).
123 “Aber in die Deutung geht nur ein, was im menschlichen Gedanken als sich erfüllender Gehalt ergriffen werden kann” (Phil. III, 231).
124 Phil. III, 227-230. Thyssen calls this section a kind of theodicy of foundering (“The Concept of ‘Foundering’ in Jaspers’ Philosophy,” in: The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 321; “Der Begriff des Scheiterns bei Karl Jaspers,” in: Karl Jaspers, op. cit., 308, 309). In my view the term “theodicy” only applies if it is taken in a general, broad sense. But even then it suggests that the necessary existence of evil can be “proved” — something which Jaspers would never claim. For after giving these interpretations he immediately deals with experiences that cannot be interpreted as necessary. Moreover he argues that the four answers should not be understood as “insights” (Phil. III, 227).
the next it has already disappeared. This movement goes back to the fact that freedom is never something lasting. Freedom is only possible when lasting existence founders and disappears for a moment.125 The second interpretation reveals another way in which freedom is necessarily bound up with foundering. It follows from the fact that freedom is only possible through nature — its antithesis. Nature has its own way of being, and is not just the “material” in which freedom appears or something like that. *Existenz* as freedom is opposed to nature and therefore it must founder in existence (*Dasein*).126 A third interpretation of the necessity of foundering emphasises the boundlessness of *Existenz* over against the moderation of finite existence.127 *Existenz* wants to become entire, complete. Thus, it blows up finiteness and founders.128 *Existenz* is only present in fragments; as such, it can be a cipher of transcendence. In the fourth interpretation, finally, which is called “speculative” and “mythic,” Jaspers interprets foundering as a necessary result of the guilt of Being that enters finite existence. In “overconfidence” Being enters existence as if this is its proper domain. But this is an illusion. Only in the foundering of existence and not in its realisation (*Daseinsverwirklichung*) is Being revealed. The guilt of becoming finite is paid for in death and ruin.129 These four interpretations very clearly express what was already tentatively concluded above: that precisely negative experiences may reveal Being or transcendence to us. Again, it is clear that the theme of evil, here in the form of foundering, is crucial in Jaspers’ thinking because it expresses the central problem of life: that of the clash between Being and existence. This means that evil is interpreted on the basis of Jaspers’ view of the problem of human existence in general.

Still, can all situations of foundering be interpreted as ciphers of Being?130 This question is actually meant as a critique. Jaspers argues that foundering that cannot be interpreted calls into question everything that has been achieved in philosophical reflection and, more specifically, the

125 Phil. III, 227.
126 “Existenz als Freiheit ... muß im Dasein zerschellen, weil sie gegen Natur verstößt” (Phil. III, 229).
127 Here Jaspers uses the term “das Eigentliche,” the proper, as a synonym of *Existenz* (Phil. III, 229).
128 “Je entschiedener sie [d.i. *Existenz*] folgt und Anpassungen ausschließt, desto mehr will sie die Endlichkeit sprengen. Ihr höchstes Maß hat kein Maß mehr. Darum muß sie scheitern.” (Phil. III, 229).
129 Phil. III, 230-231.
130 Jaspers discusses this category “of what cannot be included in interpretations” as the fifth and final interpretation of foundering (Phil. III, 231). He continues this discussion in the next section entitled “Die Chiffre des Seins im Scheitern” (233-237).
reality of Being as appearing in the ciphers.\textsuperscript{131} First, situations that seem to be beyond interpretation are situations that end meaninglessly, or in which negativity is only destructive and not constructive. Secondly, one may think of the situation of destroyed possibility, when a possibility is nipped in the bud. Thirdly, Jaspers mentions the situation of absolute forgetting in which all possible continuity is ruled out.\textsuperscript{132} Subsequently, however, Jaspers searches in even these situations for their possible character as ciphers. In this case the cipher is no longer a specific one but a cipher without words, the open cipher of silence.\textsuperscript{133} It is an answer which breaks the silence without saying anything. These answers “say” only Being or “it is” (es ist).\textsuperscript{134} In this sense Being appears even in these moments. Thus, the critique implied in these ciphers does not mean a complete absence of Being but the impossibility of interpretation. That they cannot be interpreted means that we cannot say anything more than “it is.” In this sense these situations imply a critique of or challenge for his philosophy and reflection in general. To understand this critique one should note that it appears at the very end of the third volume of Philosophie, which is called “metaphysics.” This volume deals with the problem of speaking philosophically, i.e. with a certain objectivity or universality, about transcendence. In the last section, on “foundering,” Jaspers tries to show that foundering is essential to all our experiences and expressions of transcendence in the ciphers. Metaphysics, reflection on transcendence, is thus always also broken. It consists of fragments formed by the ciphers. Because of their character of foundering these ciphers can hardly be grasped, described, let alone put into a theoretical system. Jaspers’ philosophical category of the ciphers thus implies a critique of complete or comprehensive knowledge of Being. The necessity of foundering for the appearance of Being in existence also affects our knowledge of it. It is this aspect that Jaspers’ reflections on foundering as a cipher add to the general idea of foundering that is more or less synonymous with that of the boundary situations.

4.5. The Characterisation of Jaspers’ View of Evil as “Tragic”

Now that we have investigated different aspects of Jaspers’ view of evil we can go into the question whether it is clarifying to characterise it as

\textsuperscript{131} Phil. III, 233, 234.
\textsuperscript{132} Phil. III, 231-232.
\textsuperscript{133} Phil. III, 233, 235.
\textsuperscript{134} Phil. III, 234.
tragic. The immediate reason for this characterisation lies in Jaspers’ treatise on “tragic knowing,” “Das tragische Wissen,” in his book Von der Wahrheit. 135 First we need to find out what precisely Jaspers’ view of the tragic comprises and how it incorporates many important aspects from his philosophy. Subsequently, we must examine in the next section whether this view can be related to and clarified by the distinction between ethical and tragic views of evil based on Ricœur’s analysis of symbols. Thus, Jaspers’ view may further deepen our understanding and evaluation of the distinction between the ethical and the tragic.

In his treatise on tragic knowing Jaspers turns to literary expressions of the tragic. Philosophy needs to turn to these expressions in its search for the truth. They reveal things that are not accessible to philosophy as such. The notion of truth is the central theme of this book. It concludes, briefly, that truth is multiple and broken; it exists only because we search for it unconditionally.136 Still, in the part of the book in which we find the tragic, Jaspers tries to come as close as possible to the “completion of the truth.” This completion cannot be grasped by means of rules or enforced methodically. But it can be “encircled.”137 Examples of such encirclements can be found in religion, art and literature. Jaspers calls them “original contemplations” (ursprünglichen Anschauungen). Philosophy builds on this primary consciousness of truth (Wahrheitsbewußtsein) in the form of images, acts and stories; it cannot be separated from these contemplations. They are “the other” (das Andere) of philosophy, to which it must always direct itself.138 Tragic knowing is the only example of these contemplations on which Jaspers elaborates. He wants to interpret

135 Cf. note 3 above.
136 VdW 869.
137 VdW 870.
138 VdW 916. Jaspers analyses examples of tragic texts from Greek antiquity, to the plays of Shakespeare and Lessings Nathan der Weise. He does not account for his choice of the tragic as the example of pre-philosophical encirclement of “truth.” His view of the relation between philosophy and pre-philosophical contemplations reminds us of Ricœur’s emphasis on the importance of the symbols and myths of evil for philosophical reflection on evil. This topic is less prominent in Jaspers’ thinking than in Ricœur’s, but there are certainly resemblances, also in the analysis of the tragic itself. The term “the other of philosophy” also reminds us of Ricœur’s idea of altérité or l’autre de la philosophie, which he uses to indicate the relation of philosophy to religious conceptions (“Une herméneutique philosophique de la religion: Kant,” in: Lectures III (Paris: Seuil 1994, 19-40) 19, 29, abbreviated below as Lect. III; translated as “A Philosophical Hermeneutics of Religion: Kant,” FtS (op. cit., 75-92) 75, 83). Jaspers also speaks of a “Wiederholung der ursprünglichen Anschauungen” which seems close to Ricœur’s idea of répéter l’aveu (e.g. SdM 167, SE 3). Moreover, Jaspers emphasises, like Ricœur, that philosophy cannot replace pre-philosophical conceptions (e.g. VdW 918).
different historical forms of “tragic knowledge.” In these interpretations the original contemplations must be retained; they should not be forced into some philosophical system.\textsuperscript{139}

As regards the tragic contemplations, Jaspers argues that there is philosophy hidden in them, because they interpret misery that at first seems meaningless.\textsuperscript{140} But the awareness as such of this misery, of finiteness and mortality is not yet what Jaspers calls “tragic consciousness” or “tragic attitude.”\textsuperscript{141} Tragedy differs from misery in that it appears in human acting.\textsuperscript{142} Only when people are truly trying to live their lives in a sensible way, when they are seeking truth in their actions can the tragic dimension be felt. It appears in the moments of the foundering of our acting, in the foundering of truth.\textsuperscript{143} In this foundering it is possible to sense Being. Jaspers calls tragic consciousness a transcending attitude: it surpasses the misery of existence towards Being. He relates this moment of transcending to the moment of deliverance (\textit{Erlösung}) that is inseparable from the tragic contemplation.\textsuperscript{144} “The contemplation of the tragic itself effects a deliverance from the tragic, a way of purification and deliverance.”\textsuperscript{145} This deliverance is the act of being oneself.\textsuperscript{146} The hero of the tragedy, who embodies tragic knowledge, is aware of the misery that befalls him and must come to terms with it. To describe this situation Jaspers uses the term “boundary situation.”\textsuperscript{147} It is the situation in which a change is possible, in which existence can be given up in favour of Being.\textsuperscript{148}

This brief outline of Jaspers’ notion of tragic consciousness shows many similarities with his reflections on foundering and boundary situations as well as the texts on \textit{das Böse}. The fact that precisely tragic consciousness is taken as the example of “original contemplations” reveals again how important the interpretation of misery as foundering is for Jaspers’
thinking. The point of central importance is the attitude we should adopt toward misery. The difference between misery as such and tragedy reminds us of the difference between real foundering and factual foundering.\footnote{149 See note 119, pp. 175, 176 above.} If we dare to founder in our acting we may become aware of Being, which means transcending existence. This transcending is here described in terms of a deliverance.

Jaspers’ affinity for and appreciation of tragic consciousness does not only concern its substance but also its form. Tragedy recognises something which is also central in Jaspers’ investigation into truth: “The brokenness of being true or the disunity of truth.”\footnote{150 “Die Gespaltenheit des Wahrseins oder die Nichteinheit der Wahrheit ist ein Grundbefund des tragischen Wissens” (VdW 934). In some tragedies, Jaspers argues, the hero explicitly asks for the truth, like in the case of Oedipus and Hamlet.} Tragic knowing does not take the form of philosophical reflection but remains mythical or literary. Jaspers is very alert to the danger of putting this tragic knowing into a more systematic form. He emphasises — as he did in his discussion of Job — that tragic knowledge is more like not knowing (\textit{Nichtwissen}), than having a fixed, complete view of life.\footnote{151 VdW 957-959.} The dangers of many interpretations of the tragic, especially of comprehensive tragic worldviews, are that they turn the tragic into something absolute, the essence of human existence.\footnote{152 VdW 960.} What is lost in these interpretations is the polarity of the tragic and deliverance. Tragic knowledge as Jaspers envisages it is not a comprehensive worldview. It does not give a complete interpretation of all suffering or misery. Suffering and misery are not as such tragic: they may become a means of the appearance of the tragic.\footnote{153 VdW 960.}

Thus, this analysis of the tragic enables Jaspers to speak about the relation between Being and foundering not as an insight that is reserved for philosophy. Philosophy only illuminates the elements of truth that are already present in the ciphers of the tragic.\footnote{154 VdW 960.} According to Jaspers, his way of philosophising provides the conditions for an interpretation of the tragic that does justice to its proper, floating character.\footnote{155 VdW 960.} That is also because this tragic knowing embodies essential aspects of philosophy. “In the original tragic contemplation … there is already present what is
true philosophy: movement, question, openness — being moved, astound —
truthfulness, being without illusion.” Thus, Jaspers also recognises in tragic
knowing an attitude of reflection that he appreciates very much.
This attitude is characterised by modesty and openness. Truth is not found
in general expressions but in the single, particular situations of founder-
ing as they are depicted in tragedies. We may hence conclude that in
Jaspers’ presentation of tragic knowing one easily recognises many char-
acteristics of his own reflection on evil.

4.6. Evil in a Reflective, Tragic Approach

The characterisation of Jaspers’ view of evil as tragic is tied up with the
distinction between ethical and tragic views of evil that was discovered
in Ricœur’s analysis of the symbols. Now that we have analysed Jaspers’
view and the meaning that the notion of the tragic receives in his inter-
pretation, we may link it to Ricœur’s analysis. What I finally labelled
“tragic” are all the views of evil that Ricœur presented as the reverse of
the ethical interpretation. Three important aspects that these views depict
are the anteriority, exteriority and fated character of evil. Both the view
of evil as something anterior to my acting and the aspect of its being
fated are also found in Jaspers’ thinking. They are expressed in that
foundering, boundary situations, etc. belong to the fundamental structure
of human existence. The foundering can be traced back to the clash of
Being and existence: Being can appear only in existence and not inde-
pendently, on its own. But this appearance means the ruin of existence,
even though existence holds out in the end, so that the appearance of
Being is only momentary. However, this understanding of our human
existence as characterised by foundering is not given as some general
truth. It can be discovered only when we act with conviction, live with-
out reservation. Then we may founder and discover the problem of our
human life: the presence of Being in existence. This means that the dis-
covery of foundering as something anterior, as our fate, must not be
understood in the sense that it can be traced back to something outside
ourselves. It is precisely the human structure of existence that appears
in foundering. As a result, evil does not actually appear as something

156 “In der ursprünglichen tragischen Anschauung, wenn sie rein bewahrt wird, liegt schon,
was eigentlich Philosophie ist: Bewegung, Frage, Offenheit, — Ergriffenheit, Staunen —
Wahrhaftigkeit, Illusionslosigkeit” (VdW 960).
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exterior, as a power outside human beings that infects or seduces them. One might say that the picture of evil depicted in the tragic myth as having its origin prior to human existence or in the decisions of the gods is here expressed in that foundering is part of the structure of being human — taking into account that for Jaspers this structure can only be discovered in a specific historical situation of foundering. Thus, although the exteriority of evil is not present, Ricœur’s expressions of the anteriority and fated character of evil, such as “evil was already there, even before I committed it” or “my evil is the continuation of an evil that already existed,” or “this evil is inevitable” correspond with the main line in Jaspers’ thinking on evil.

Ricœur, however, emphatically presents this tragic view of evil as the reverse of the ethical view. Is this also the case in Jaspers’ thinking? Behind this question lies the issue of the ambiguity of views of evil. Does Jaspers’ mainly tragic view also incorporate aspects that deviate from the tragic emphasis? Is it in general possible to incorporate the ethical into a mainly tragic view? Below I will first deal with these questions. Subsequently I will return to the problem mentioned above as to whether “evil” is still a separate category and an appropriate term in a tragic view.157 Is it meaningful to speak about evil if this is to be finally traced back to a more fundamental problem that is inevitably part of human existence? A third issue we need to investigate is Jaspers’ awareness of the problematic character of reflection in dealing with evil and his emphasis on Nichtwissen in reflection on evil. Can this awareness be understood as his being able to account for the absurdities and contradictions related to the theme of evil? Finally, I will go into the question of the relation between religion and evil in Jaspers’ thinking.

In Ricœur’s analysis of the symbols of evil it turns out that tragic views are present as the reverse of the ethical view. They correct the ethical view. This order is eventually normative in Ricœur’s view of evil. First, evil must be recognised as my act for which I alone am responsible. Only secondarily can this evil be seen as already existing, as fate, as a power outside human beings. Is this order also present in Jaspers’ thinking? Does his recognition of foundering as belonging to the structure of being human follow the confession of the evil act and the acceptance of one’s guilt? The order seems precisely opposite. First, there is the experience of some fact of evil, whether suffering or moral evil. In this experience of evil one may encounter something other, something which transcends

157 See p. 168 above.
this situation, Being itself. Then the experience turns into a boundary situation in which one experiences foundering. The inevitability of this foundering may be recognised. But this is not some general recognition or insight: it is the recognition that foundering is inevitable in my situation and that I am nevertheless responsible for it. It is the acceptance of the guilt of my existence, which appears in different situations. Thus the acceptance of responsibility for foundering appears, so to say, “after” the recognition of its inevitability.

The use of the term “guilt” in this context is surprising. One would perhaps expect notions like recognition and acceptance of one’s situation. But the notion of guilt does seem to introduce an ethical view and suggests responsibility. In this notion an ambiguity seems to enter Jaspers’ reflection — albeit a different kind of ambiguity from what we found in Ricoëur. Thus, this notion of guilt is suitable to further explore the idea of ambiguity, i.e. the different interpretations that can be present at the same time in thinking about evil and are often incompatible with one another. Does Jaspers’ notion of guilt put the idea of ambiguity in a different light in comparison to what we discovered in the views of Ricoëur and Kant?

The theme of guilt is important in Jaspers’ thinking. We came across it several times in the passages related to evil: in relation to the boundary situations, the evil will, and the ciphers of the existential situation, especially that of predestination. In the interpretations of foundering as necessary Jaspers declares Existenz guilty for several reasons, e.g. that Being is boundless and directed at realisation in existence.158 As Existenz cannot help being like this, guilt must be regarded as a necessary phenomenon. Existenz must be of this nature. Guilt is inherent in becoming Existenz. In other texts Jaspers points out that guilt is inevitable because I must always make choices, limit myself and thus reject other possibilities.159 I become guilty in communication, as communication with one person implies excluding others and also because communication fails.160 I am guilty when I accept my character, my So-sein, as mine.161

Dufrenne and Ricoëur make a good point when they observe that Jaspers relates evil or fault (la faute) closely to the non-chosen constitution of our existence.162 According to them, this interpretation runs counter to the
“whole Christian tradition, which conceives of fault only on the basis of innocence.” For Jaspers, guilt seems to become a category without relation to free willing and acting. “Fault looses its moral meaning to take on an ontological signification.” Innocence is, indeed, a term that is not easily found in Jaspers’ philosophical vocabulary. The non-moral character of Jaspers’ view is clearly shown in comparison to Kant’s view. Although Kant, like Jaspers, qualifies evil as something “innate” and relates it to the evil nature of human beings that precedes all concrete actions, he tries hard not to equate, contrary to Jaspers, evil and nature. No matter how radical evil is, the possibility remains of not doing evil, of being innocent. Moreover, all evil acts must be regarded as committed out of a state of innocence. Human responsibility means that we may have acted otherwise. For Jaspers, on the other hand, guilt is rooted in our inevitable human condition in which Being runs counter to existence and founders in it. Jaspers’ point is not to show that guilt could and should not have been there but that it is there, inevitably.

Still, this guilt does not mean anything if it is not recognised and accepted as my personal guilt for my personal situation. This means that there is also an element of choice, of conscious willing attached to Jaspers’ notion of guilt. For Jaspers, there is a great difference between someone who acknowledges guilt as an inevitable characteristic of his existence and someone who does not. The difference consists in a choice, in consciously taking the responsibility on oneself for the inevitable guilt of foundering in one’s life. This appropriation of guilt starts with a good insight into the shortcomings of the human condition, more than
with an insight into my personal moral choices. The notion of freedom of choice is much stronger in ethical approaches like Kant’s than in Jaspers’. Still, this moment of choice is not inconsiderable for Jaspers.\textsuperscript{166}

But does this idea of choice introduce an ethical discourse in Jaspers’ thinking about evil, so that an ambiguity of perspectives on evil arises? There is certainly an ethical moment in this view and to that extent ambiguity. Still, this ambiguity remains within the limits set by the tragic view; it is not radical. It is even less strongly present than in Kant’s thinking. Compared to the contradictions we found in Kant’s view of evil — caused by the introduction of tragic elements in his mainly ethical view — Jaspers’ thinking about evil is much more homogeneous. We saw that in Kant’s approach the tragic view could only be introduced at the cost of inconsistency and paradoxical statements. Such inconsistencies seem to be absent in Jaspers’ work. That does not mean that Jaspers’ thinking is wholly consistent and without tension or paradox. Of course, the idea of accepting inevitable guilt has something paradoxical about it. But, in the end, the moment of having insight into and accepting the inevitability of evil is most important. As a result, there is no room for a truly ethical view: the tragic view is overpowering. In this sense Jaspers’ view of evil is one-sided: it is not the broad view in which both tragic and ethical perspectives are present.

From the dominance of the tragic view the question arises of whether evil is a distinct category at all in this tragic view. We came across this question several times. If all kinds of evil phenomena like foundering, boundary situations, the antinomic structure etc. must be understood as fundamentally and inevitably characteristic of human existence, should they be called “evil”? The clash of Being and existence is unavoidable; it could not be different. Is it then evil? A life without experiences of this clash is not actually possible and especially not desirable; it would be a life without \textit{Existenz}. Completeness, the absence of foundering, boundlessness is not possible for human beings. It does not even seem to be meaningful to imagine it. What is important is to recognise that life is characterised by a fundamental antinomy. Evil must be accepted as something for which I bear guilt. But this does not mean that I could live without guilt. I should rather face its inevitable presence. Evil in the tragic view is thus not something absurd or impossible or something which should not be there. It is the all too possible, the inevitable. If evil is our fate, is it then still evil?

In his analysis of the myths of evil Ricoeur pointed out that evil is presented as being in tension with a totality of meaning. Moreover, he emphasised how the myths depict the transition from good to evil in an ontological way: they show the contrast between primordial goodness and the actual evil state. Such contrasts are not present in Jaspers’ view. Furthermore, the notions of a beginning and an end of evil also turned out to be important in the expressions Ricoeur analyses. This related to a hopeful view in which evil is not a fundamental characteristic of human beings, not an ontological category. But it also implied that evil is absurd: that what is created good turns out in fact to be evil. I will go into this in detail in the final chapter. Here I just want to note that in Jaspers’ tragic view it does not seem meaningful to speak of evil as having a beginning or end. It has always existed and it will always exist. Jaspers speaks of deliverance in relation to the tragic view. But this deliverance consists precisely in becoming oneself, in experiencing Being in existence. Thus, it is in a sense related to foundering. There is no real deliverance from foundering. It is clear that from this tragic philosophy a very different notion of evil arises from what we found in Ricoeur’s analyses. In his analyses the ethical view of evil was found to be primary; the tragic is its reverse. The suggestion that this order is constitutive of the notion of evil as such seems to be confirmed by Jaspers’ tragic view. Here the notion of evil is not so much a distinct category. On the other hand, Jaspers’ philosophy clearly displays a relatively great attentiveness to experiences of suffering and failure. In comparison to Kant, Jaspers’ view of evil comprises much more different phenomena. In contrast to Kant, Jaspers also pays attention to physical evil; but moral evil is not absent either. His attention for different forms of evil does not result in extensive descriptions of real life experiences. Still, as we have seen, the themes of foundering, boundary situations etc. are central for Jaspers’ thinking. What motivates his attention for these themes? His interest in what may be called the dark side of life springs from his interest in Existenz. Problems of human life like death, sickness, guilt or struggle are pre-eminently moments in which we may become Existenz, in which we may experience Being in existence. Because the appearance of Being in existence implies conflict, clash or foundering, these problems are, in particular, moments in which we may become a self. This means that his interest in failure or suffering is not an interest in these phenomena as such but as occasions for becoming oneself. This is shown, for

167 Perhaps the absence of the term “evil” in passages that deal with related themes like boundary situations or foundering is also a sign of this.
example, in the distinction Jaspers makes between factual foundering and real foundering or between misery and the tragic. If we continue to ask what motivates this interest in *Existenz* we finally come upon what may be called a belief in Being. It is the belief that even in the ruin that is not open to interpretation (*undeutbar*) “foundering does not reveal nothingness but the Being of transcendence.”¹⁶⁸ In relation to this experience of Being in the midst of foundering Jaspers even speaks of peace and rest. This peace can only be found in a leap from the dread (*Angst*) that hopeless reality causes. Jaspers believes such a leap to be possible because it has its ground or origin in the Being of transcendence.¹⁶⁹ Still, he recognises that this peace may fail to appear. Then only an active form of enduring (*dulden*) is possible which sticks to Being although it does not appear.¹⁷⁰ This “enduring in the bravery of life” is embodied in the tragic hero who freely bears his ruin.¹⁷¹ Both the attitude of peace and that of enduring have their ground in the belief in Being. It is this belief that inspires Jaspers’ attentiveness to failure and suffering.

However, this belief in the possibility of peace or of enduring the foundering in one’s belief in Being can hardly be expressed in general, reflective formulations. The experience of Being is never a certitude or something we have at our disposal. Becoming *Existenz* is a struggle; it means foundering, questioning, doubting, remaining open. As we have seen, this uncertainty also appears at the level of reflection on *Existenz* and Being. As a result we find in Jaspers’ thinking an aversion to the idea of complete knowledge or general truth. Jaspers goes most deeply into this problem in his discussion of the cipher of foundering.¹⁷² Various interpreters of Jaspers’ thinking emphasise the fundamental significance of this discussion for his *Philosophie*.¹⁷³ It is both a summary and a critique of his thinking. Especially this critical function of the cipher of foundering makes clear that Jaspers is aware of the dangers of the philosophical or metaphysical desire to approach Being itself. Being is

¹⁶⁸ “... das Scheitern doch nicht das Nichts zeigt, sondern das Sein der Transzendenz” (Phil. III, 233).
¹⁶⁹ Phil. III, 235.
¹⁷⁰ Phil. III, 236.
¹⁷¹ “Dulden in der Tapferkeit des Lebens” (VdW 946).
¹⁷² See section 4.4.2. above.
never completely present; we never possess it. It is revealed only in boundary situations, in moments of foundering. The appearance of Being is never an automatism but always a struggle that may founder itself. The notion of foundering thus even criticises its own interpretation as a cipher of Being. Jaspers does not want to give a full interpretation of either foundering or Being itself. This conviction also appears in his thinking on evil. He warns, for example, of the dangers that reflection turns evil into something harmless or some object outside ourselves.

This awareness of the dangers of reflection on evil reminds us of Ricoeur’s emphasis on the problematic relation between reflection and the theme of evil. In his case this emphasis follows from the difficulty of taking the absurdity of evil into account and the contradictions and obscurity inherent in it, i.e. its ambiguity. As regards Jaspers’ suspicion concerning reflection’s capacity to deal with evil, one might also use these terms. The absurd character of foundering would be that Being has to founder in order to be experienced. The ambiguity may be said to be present in that what seems at first to be misery finally turns out to be a discovery of Being. Still, we do not find terms like “absurd” or “ambiguity” in Jaspers’ thinking and perhaps we must say that that is telling, for the question still remains as to whether evil may be called absurd if things could not have been different. In Ricoeur’s view, the absurd lies in that human beings are created good but in fact turn out to be evil. In this sense their sinfulness has something inevitable about it; it characterises the human state. Still, things could and should have been different. It is difficult to express this absurdity in reflection. For Jaspers, the difficulty of reflection on evil lies in a different problem: in the non-permanent appearance of Being. Thus the awareness of the problematic relation between reflection and evil in both Ricoeur and Jaspers is motivated by their specific view of evil. These views differ but result in a similar suspicion of the possibility of reflection on evil.

In the context of our investigation into the relation between the theme of evil and religion it is significant that Jaspers’ view of evil is motivated by a belief in Being. Can this belief be called “religious”? Although Jaspers claims the term “philosophical faith” for his thinking and distinguishes it from the revelation of the historical religions it is plain that Jaspers’ philosophy has religious overtones. This appears in the central importance of that which goes beyond finite existence: transcendence.

174 “Nirgends habe ich ‘das Sein’”. (Phil. III, 3).
Being, the Encompassing, etc. Philosophy’s principal task is to turn to this transcendence by transcending the world of objects (Gegenständl
clichkeit) in a thinking that is nevertheless inevitably linked to objects (gegenständlichen Denken).\textsuperscript{175} Jaspers’ belief in Being lies behind his attentiveness to foundering as we have seen. One may say that Jaspers is attentive to foundering because he is open to transcendence. Thus, his belief seems to be constitutive of his view of evil and his dealing with suffering and failure. In this respect Jaspers’ description of tragic knowing also applies to his own thinking: it interprets misery that seems meaningless at first.\textsuperscript{176}

However, although Jaspers’ openness towards transcendence results in attention for evil, one might object that his interpretation of evil is given too easily and does not do justice to the experiences of misery. Is it possible to believe in Being that appears in foundering and, at the same time, to account for the experiences of evil in a fully serious way? Jaspers’ interpretation of misery does not ignore the fact that Being is not always discernable. Moreover, Jaspers recognises the attraction that Nichtsein exerts on human beings.\textsuperscript{177} The notion of nihilism appears quite frequently in his work. Jaspers expresses the extremes between which human beings are torn as “the power of the law of the day” (das Gesetz des Tages) and “the passion for the night” (die Leidenschaft zur Nacht). The latter is the passion for destruction and ruin, which is opposed to the order and clarity of the law of the day.\textsuperscript{178} Jaspers even argues that nihilism is inevitable as a stage on the way to self-consciousness.\textsuperscript{179} Yet in this discussion of the appeal of nothingness (Nichts) Jaspers’ faith is not absent. He observes that human beings live in spite of the attraction of nihilism. Absolute nihilism is not or hardly present in reality. Instead, there is something firm (fest) which keeps a hold on people. This cannot be understood or proved. This “firm” something seems to be very much like what he in other instances calls Being. Being makes it possible to interpret foundering as meaningful. Still, Being is not an easy source of comfort. Jaspers does not give much substance to the notion of Being or transcendence. That would be contrary to his conviction that we cannot gain knowledge

\textsuperscript{175} phGl 20-21.
\textsuperscript{176} See p. 180, note 140 above.
\textsuperscript{177} Cf. the discussion of “Skeptizismus und Nihilismus” in Psychologie der Weltanschauungen where Jaspers analyses the structures of human existence that may lead to nihilism (PsW 285-304).
\textsuperscript{178} Cf. e.g. Phil III, 102-116.
\textsuperscript{179} PsW 303.
about transcendence or wholly come to grips with it. A very plain expression of transcendence is “it is.”\(^{180}\) The “brute existence” of being may be the only firm thing that keeps us from sinking into despair.\(^{181}\) Thus, Jaspers does oppose something to the omnipresence of foundering. But this “something” is quite empty. It is grounded in the bare fact that we are able to reflect on foundering and thereby transcend it — meagre as this may sound. Jaspers does not bury experiences of evil under an easy announcement of comfort or deliverance. But he does expect a great deal from the human capacity to live with the insight into the fundamental brokenness of one’s existence.

It is clear that Jaspers’ belief in Being does not mean that he is interested in designing a theory of Being, a metaphysics in any traditional sense. He does not want to pretend to have knowledge about Being as such. Therefore, he does not so much speak about transcendence in terms of an active power that does things — such as, for example, breaking into existence, thus creating a boundary situation, or opening our eyes to the extent of guilt.\(^{182}\) Rather, he is interested in how human beings may become open to this transcendence. Jaspers shares with Kant both this avoidance of metaphysical speculation on the “activity” or “power” of transcendence as regards evil and the emphasis on what we ourselves should do. Kant mentions, for example, the idea of supernatural cooperation that may help us to become good but emphasises immediately that we cannot understand it.\(^{183}\) We should focus on what human beings must do themselves to become worthy of this “higher assistance.” Yet the function of the religious dimension in relation to evil is different in Kant from Jaspers’. In Kant’s thinking the confrontation with the Christian religion resulted in reflection on a new theme; this breaks his strictly moral reasoning. It becomes important to speak about human beings as evil by nature — which, moreover, causes a great deal of tension with the moral arguments. In Jaspers’ thinking we do not find such a widening of horizon under the influence of religion. He gives a more harmonising interpretation of religious doctrines. The theme of evil is not introduced under the influence of the examination of religion either. In the book in which Jaspers explicitly examines historical religions, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, his view of evil or suffering does not differ significantly

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180 See p. 178, note 134 above (Phil III, 234).
181 “das brutale Dasein seines Wesens” (PnW 290).
182 Remarks like these are not wholly absent, however. E.g.: “Transzendenz will in der Daseinswirklichkeit meine Hingabe” (Phil. III, 75).
183 See Chapter 3, p.138.
from other texts. Here, he tries to discover the experiences underlying
the doctrines of e.g. predestination or original sin. But these experiences
do not differ from the general experiences examined in his illumination
of Existenz. Aspects of the historical religions may thus be interpreted
existentially, which means that the focus is on the human side. This focus
is one of the things Jaspers appreciates in Kant’s view of evil — even though
we have seen that their views are, in fact, very different.

When we turn in the next chapter to Karl Barth’s view of evil we will
find a completely different emphasis. The reticence in speaking about
transcendence and the emphasis on the human powers to deal with evil
are not prominent in his fully theological thinking. In the next chapter we
will investigate the depiction of evil to which this thinking leads.
CHAPTER 5

KARL BARTH’S NOTION OF DAS NICHTIGE
AND THE PROBLEM OF KNOWING EVIL

With Karl Barth’s reflection on evil we enter a new area in our investigation: a fully theological view of evil situated in and determined by the Christian faith. In the previous chapters I dealt with views in which the religious dimension was not dominant — although it was not absent either. These approaches did not aim to develop a specific Christian view of evil. Rather, they established criteria for their approach that were not directly determined by a Christian view but by an ethical and tragic view respectively. In the analysis of these authors I dealt with the general questions of this investigation by looking at the content of the notion of evil. The project of regauging the notion of evil and investigating the question in which context it is at home was performed by analysing what the different authors mean by evil. Ricœur’s broad notion of evil, which includes both ethical and tragic views, functioned as the starting point for this analysis. From his broad notion the question arose as to whether ambiguity is constitutive for the notion of evil as such. Is it still meaningful to speak of evil if it is seen mainly as something for which human beings are entirely responsible — the ethical view — or mainly as something inevitable — tragic view? In the reflections of Kant and Jaspers we found examples of views that emphasise, respectively, responsibility and inevitability. I concluded that this emphasis leads to a certain one-sidedness: because of the dominance of either the ethical or the tragic view evil is not discussed in its full breadth. This one-sidedness seemed stronger in the tragic view than in the ethical one. The broad notion of evil as found in Ricœur’s analysis of the symbols and myths is, however, also a
KARL BARTH’S NOTION OF DAS NICHTIGE

notion which stems from a religious context indicated by the term “confession.” Although religious elements are not absent from the reflections of Kant and Jaspers, it is important to deal with a fully religious view as well in our investigation. Barth’s approach will serve this purpose. In order to preclude all too quick or easy conclusions regarding the relation between the broad, ambiguous notion of evil as found in Ricœur and the religious context I will first interpret Barth without the tools taken from Ricœur. In this respect the investigation of this chapter differs fundamentally from that of Kant and Jaspers. In the next chapter, however, I will return to this discussion with the other authors and compare them in order to arrive at a final evaluation of the question of the religious nature of evil.

Barth’s thinking is so fully theological, however, that it seems difficult to relate his view to any other approach, let alone the philosophical ones of Ricœur, Kant en Jaspers. Barth claims a specific status for his theological reflection. He opposes it to reflection that is concerned with thinking or knowledge in general. Theology is based on a specific tradition, i.e. the Christian tradition. For Barth, there is a radical difference between theological and philosophical or general human reflection. Philosophical reflection starts with the human side. It begins with our human views of ourselves and the world and with our human questions and problems. Theological reflection, on the other hand, has a radically different starting point. The object of theological reflection is God. But, again, this must not be understood in a general way, as if theology is concerned with a general conception of God: theology is the knowledge (Wissenschaft) of God as the object of the proclamation of the church.1 Theology claims that God has made himself known to his creatures, and the church proclaims God on the basis of this revelation. Theology is the objective investigation of this revelation.2 Therefore, the starting point of theological reflection is

1 “Wir verstehen unter Theologie die der Kirche, ..., zugeordnete Wissenschaft von Gott als dem Gegenstand der Verkündigung dieser Kirche” (“Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie” (1929), in: Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe Vol. III (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag 1994, 344-392) 347). The German term Wissenschaft is difficult to translate into English. Because the English term “science” usually refers to those disciplines that belong to science proper (the natural sciences, etc.), I will use the term “knowledge.”

2 “Sie [die Theologie] ist sachlich geordnete Erforschung der Wahrheit in Beziehung auf Gott als den Gegenstand der kirchlichen Verkündigung” (“Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie,” Gesamtausgabe Vol. III, op. cit., 347). Cf. KD II/3, 333, CD 295, where Barth notes that “greatest intellectual probity,” “rigorous logic” (guter Ordnung), and “objectivity” (strenger Sachlichkeit) are also requirements of theology.
KARL BARTH'S NOTION OF DAS NICHTIGE

3 I will take up the question of the precise relation between Barth’s notion of das Nichtige and what is usually called “evil” below. The connotations of the German term das Nichtige are difficult to convey in an English translation. I will adhere to the most common translation of das Nichtige as “nothingness.” For other possible translations see the editor’s note CD III/1, 289. The chapter in which Barth deals with nothingness is §50 Gott und das Nichtige (KD III/3 327-425, CD 289-368).

4 For example, in the chapters on nothingness we find an extensive excursus in which Barth deals with the views of evil and sin in Julius Müller, Kant, Leibniz, Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Sartre (KD III/3 355-402, CD 321-349). Apart from the section on Kant and Müller (see chapter 6, p. 278), I do not go into these discussions because that would require explaining the views of these authors as well. That would take up a lot of room in which I prefer to discuss other aspects of Barth’s view of nothingness, e.g. the sections on sin in part four of the Church Dogmatics.

5 I will take up the question of the precise relation between Barth’s notion of das Nichtige and what is usually called “evil” below. The connotations of the German term das Nichtige are difficult to convey in an English translation. I will adhere to the most common translation of das Nichtige as “nothingness.” For other possible translations see the editor’s note CD III/1, 289. The chapter in which Barth deals with nothingness is §50 Gott und das Nichtige (KD III/3 327-425, CD 289-368).

of each other. These remarks are sufficient to legitimise the attempt to compare Barth’s view of evil with philosophical ones.

My main motive for choosing Barth’s reflection on nothingness as an example of a fully theological reflection on evil is related, as I indicated in the Introduction, to his objections to reflection in the classical form of a theodicy. Barth distrusts theodicy fundamentally because of its systematic and abstract approach. Behind this criticism lies Barth’s strong opinion on the question of how evil can be known. Barth is critical of many theological or philosophical theories of evil as well as of general views concerning evil. They often depart from some general or natural knowledge of evil; they think it is obvious what evil is. Because of this attitude they run the risk of not taking evil seriously, of turning it into something harmless. Because of his awareness of this risk and attention to the question of what reflection on evil should be, Barth is relevant for our investigation into the problems related to reflection on evil. This investigation was initiated by Ricœur’s view of this topic. He highlights the problem of how reflection — often aiming at unambiguous clarity and explanation — may account for the absurd and ambiguous character of evil. In order not to lose sight of important aspects of evil he turns to expressions of evil that are closer to experience than the reflective expressions found in much theology or philosophy. Starting from Ricœur’s view of this problem of reflection, I also paid attention to this in my analysis of Kant and Jaspers. In relation to Kant I investigated whether his reflective approach is an illustration of the difficulty of taking into account the ambiguity and absurdity of evil. Kant does not discuss the general question of how we should reflect on evil himself. He concentrates on showing that the ethical view of evil that regards it as something for which we are responsible should be central; thus the danger of representing evil as something for which we are not fully responsible can be avoided. In Jaspers’ reflections on evil the problem of reflection on evil is a separate point of attention. He pays attention to the risk of reflection on evil from his conviction that precisely the experience of not-knowing is characteristic of dealing with evil. Evil phenomena may become occasions for Existen 7 precisely if we acknowledge that we cannot fully understand

8 Ricœur mentions Barth’s “broken dialectic” as a possible alternative to a theodicy approach to evil (Paul Ricœur, “Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” FrS 257-258; Le Mal, op. cit., 34-38).
or grasp them. The idea of complete knowledge of or insight into evil thus becomes suspect. Barth’s perception of the problematic character of reflection on evil differs from these three views in that it is based on theological motives. From the perspective of his revelation-based theology all natural knowledge is problematic. This means that Barth’s argumentation is very different from that of the other authors. Because the specific character of Barth’s approach is inherently related to the problem of how to know evil, this problem will be of central importance for the investigation of this chapter.

In order to understand the proper character of Barth’s approach I will first analyse it separately. Also, because the comparison of his view with other non-theological approaches is not easy, it is useful to analyse Barth’s reflection first by confronting it with its own standards and criteria. This means that I will not focus on the meta-question of whether this theological approach is valid as such. Dealing with this question would take us in a much different direction from the discussion that is the concern of this book. For the present study it seems most fruitful first to clarify and understand Barth according to his own terms. In this way we can gain insight into a clear example of what a fully theological view of evil may comprise. In the next chapter I will show, subsequently, that this separate analysis also enables — in a second movement — a comparison of Barth’s view to that of the other authors. Still, for this comparison we will also need the conclusions from Ricœur’s reflections. Central in my analysis of Barth’s view of evil in this chapter will be his characterisation of theology as “broken.” I choose this point of view because Barth emphasises this characteristic precisely in relation to theological reflection on nothingness. All theology is necessarily broken. But this brokenness appears “extraordinarily clearly” in theological reflection on nothingness. In Barth’s view, if theologians are aware of this when dealing with evil, possible misconceptions can be prevented. Brokenness thus becomes a criterion for good theological reflection, which is pre-eminently noticeable in reflection on nothingness. With this notion we seem to have an access to Barth’s way of dealing with evil that is directly linked to the problem of how we may know evil. Moreover, it may enable us to review Barth critically on the basis of a criterion that is taken from his own thinking. Therefore, I will take this as the starting point of my analysis. In the following I will first explore the general

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9 KD III/3, 332, CD 293.
characterisation of theology as broken reflection. Subsequently, I will investigate whether Barth’s treatise on nothingness can be characterised as broken. To discover this, I will also deal with misconceptions concerning nothingness that may be taken as examples of “unbroken” thinking. In these explorations I will, of course, also pay attention to the question of what precisely Barth means by the notion of nothingness and in which respects it may be seen as an equivalent of the notion of evil.

5.1. Barth’s Broken Theology

What precisely does Barth mean by this criterion of “brokenness”? And how is it related to the subject of nothingness? Barth introduces it after having pointed out the errors that easily enter our reflection if we try to think nothingness in relation to God.10 These errors may be avoided if we “soberly acknowledge that we have here an extraordinarily clear demonstration of the necessary brokenness of all theological thought and utterance.”11 He explains this broken character in the sense that it does not meet our human standards of knowledge: “It can never satisfy the natural aspiration of human thought and utterance for completeness (Vollständigkeit) and compactness (Geschlossenheit).”12 Moreover, the object of theology is not demonstrable by our own human resources. Theology can refer only to the evidence that is given in the self-revelation of the object. In this revelation lies the truth of theological thinking, rather than in a self-constructed method or argumentation. This implies that theology cannot “seize” its object, cannot catch hold of it. Thus, Barth argues, theology “can never form a system.”13 It has to approach its object again

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10 KD III/3, 330-332, CD 292-293; see also p. 211 below.
11 KD III/3, 332, CD 293.
12 KD III/3, 332, CD 293.
13 KD III/3, 332, CD 293. Barth repeats this statement several times in this passage. He argues: “Not even objectively is the relationship between Creator and creature a system. It is always disrupted by this alien element. Hence there can be no system in the subjective knowledge of this relationship, and therefore in theology.... Here if anywhere it is imperative that theology as the subjective reproduction of objective reality ought not to impose or simulate a system” (KD III/3, CD 294). Further on Barth also repeats twice the terms “complete” and “compact” in relation to this absence of a system: “... it does not mean that we shall be led to a system nor to the complete and compact sequence of thoughts and statements yielded by a principle.... It [i.e. theology] must not degenerate into a system.... It must not strain after completeness and compactness” (KD III/3, 334, CD 295). Cf. also KD III/3 408, CD 354.
and again from different angles. In this sense all theological thought is broken thought.

Before going into the precise relation of this brokenness to nothingness, I will first explore this general characterisation of theology as lacking completeness and compactness, evidence and a comprehensive system. This portrait of theology as not able to meet the standards of common human knowledge may be clarified by taking into account some of Barth’s reflections on the relation between philosophy and theology. In these reflections Barth also explains the specific character of theology by contrasting it with natural human criteria for knowledge that operate in philosophy.

In Barth’s view, theology is a thoroughly human investigation of a knowledge that is the merciful gift of God. One of the main risks this specific investigation entails is that it becomes an all-too-human affair, i.e., it starts in fact from the human side, from human questions and problems, instead of from God’s revelation. This risk is also present in the case of reflection on nothingness, for example in the approach of theodicy. Here Barth explains this inclination to start from the human side as theology’s aspiration to look like philosophy. Theodicy bears too close a resemblance to philosophy, which results in a too abstract approach to nothingness that cannot take the historical (geschichtlich) character of God’s revelation into account. Barth summarises these faults of theodicy as being an approach to nothingness “from without.” Theology, on the other hand, should approach all questions and problems “from within,” i.e. from within the framework of revelation, the history of God with his creature. In a later article, Barth describes this difference between theology and philosophy as one in the order and direction of thinking. Philosophy’s approach

14 Besides passages from the chapter on nothingness in KD III/3 I will refer to the articles “Philosophie und Theologie” and “Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie” mentioned above and to a passage in the chapter on the knowledge of God in KD II/1.
15 KD III/3, 423 CD 365-366. I will go into this more deeply below, p. 212.
16 KD III/3 423, CD 366.
17 I am, in this chapter, deliberately avoiding the general discussion of whether a revelation-based thinking from within is at all possible, as opposed to experience-based thinking “from without.” Of course I see the relevance of this discussion. But going into it would entail a complete evaluation of Barth’s theological principles. The limited aim of this investigation does not seem to be the context for such a general discussion. Therefore, I will take up this discussion only when it arises in relation to Barth’s reflections on nothingness. At several points I will discuss the problem of what precisely this revelation from which Barth wants to start comprises as distinct from our own human experiences and intuitions.
“from without” may also be called an approach “from below,” i.e.,
starting from the earthly, human side, while theology starts “from above.”

However, theology and philosophy may also be said to face the “one,
single, total truth.” 19 This one truth has two moments that can be
expressed in theological language as Creator and creature, or in philo-
sophical pairs like idea and phenomenon, or logos and reason, or tran-
scendence and existence. 20 Both philosophy and theology thus have to
do with these two opposed but inextricably connected moments of truth.
But they arrange them differently. According to the theologian, God
has primacy over the creatures. 21 The creature is enclosed within God.
Therefore the movement in theological thinking should be downwards:
starting from God and descending toward the creature. 22 After this first
movement and only in virtue of it can there be a second movement from
the creatures upwards to God. 23 The philosopher’s primary interest, on
the other hand, lies in the creature, in human beings. 24 From the perspective
of the theologian, philosophy moves from creature to creator and back
again. In Barth’s view, the difference between the theological and the
philosophical order of thinking is radical. The theologian cannot join the
philosopher on his way to the truth without becoming a “pseudo-theolo-
gian;” the philosopher, on the other hand, would become a “crypto-
thelogian” if he would travel the road of the theologian. 25

19 “die eine, einzige, … ganze Wahrheit” (“Philosophie und Theologie,” in: Philoso-
phie und christliche Existenz, op. cit., 94; cf. also 95).
20 Barth mentions the following pairs: “die Idee und die Erscheinung, die causa prima
und die durch sie bewegten causae secundae, das ‘Ding an sich’ und dessen theoretisch-
praktische Apperzeption, den Logos und die Vernunft, den Geist und seine Selbstentfal-
tungen, die Tranzsendenz (vielleicht auch die Essenz) und die Existenz, das Sein und
das Dasein …” (“Philosophie und Theologie,” in: Philosophie und christliche Existenz,
op. cit., 96). In an earlier article Barth mentions similar pairs which he then calls “end
points of human thinking” that constitute the fundamental problem of philosophy, which
theology cannot ignore either (“Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie,” Gesamtausgabe
22 “Philosophie und Theologie,” in: Philosophie und christliche Existenz, op. cit., 97-
102.
Barth also mentions dogmatic terms for these two movements: the act of “condescen-
sion” (Kondeszendenz) which encloses that of “elevation” (Elevation).
Barth emphasises that the theologian cannot speak for the philosopher (e.g., id. 99, 100,
101). He thus characterises the view of philosophy he presents in this article as a theo-
logical view, using theological terms.
The distinction between the two disciplines may be clarified further by taking into account Barth’s discussion of realism and idealism in relation to philosophy and theology. The realistic and the idealistic view may be present in theology just as well as in philosophy. The realistic view argues that God must be perceived as in line with given reality. The idealistic view, on the other hand, distrusts this naive realistic confidence in the givenness of God in reality and emphasises that God is hidden and differs fundamentally from given reality. Idealism is thus, in Barth’s view, concerned with a second, deeper, stage of knowledge. Criticising the realistic approach, it seeks a truth that lies beyond reality. It points out the difference between God’s being and that of all other given things. This does not mean that it excludes given reality. It leads away from reality into a domain of truth that does not coincide with reality. But from this domain it leads back to reality, which must then be understood as the domain of truths through which the light of the one truth can be seen. Barth designates this movement of idealism as a hyperbolic movement. He acknowledges that this idealistic tendency is very fundamental to theology. God’s revelation has to be distinguished from given reality as “not-given.”

Still, the idealistic movement does not necessarily bring about genuine theology, according to Barth. He indicates three dangers to the idealistic position that clarify theology’s specific character in comparison to philosophy. First, theology does not conceive of the hyperbola in the sense of some general road towards God, open to everyone. The criterion for the determination of the truth is not something human beings possess themselves. This criterion must be bestowed on them in God’s revelation to them. God’s revelation is not a general possibility of human reason but a specific possibility of God. Secondly, for the theologian the hyperbola

30 In “Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie” Barth also points out three dangers of the realistic position (Gesamtausgabe Vol. III, op. cit., 365-368). The realistic tendency is not at all absent from theology, as Aquinas’ doctrine of the *analogia entis* shows. Therefore, Barth defines the theological position against both realism and idealism. In the last part of this article Barth clarifies the proper character of a theological dialectics between realism and idealism over against the philosophical way of relating realism and idealism (381-392).
is an indirect movement. It does not signify that human beings are able to describe the word of God directly — they can only trace it indirectly. Theology’s speaking about God is secondary: an answer to God’s call. Thirdly, the establishment of the truth must, according to theology, be understood as an act of God alone and not as co-operation between God and human beings. From the human side, knowledge of God is only an act of obedience, of acknowledgement of the truth that God reveals. From these three dangers it is clear that, although theology and philosophy may share an idealistic position that emphasises the need to transcend reality in order to gain knowledge of the truth, theology has its own special character. Searching for truth beyond reality is not yet theology. A real primacy of God over the creature is not easily achieved. Theology has to take its starting point in God’s revelation and thus distinguish itself from philosophy, in spite of their shared idealistic approach.

However, Barth also argues that theology is no more able than philosophy to speak “from heaven downwards.” Both philosophy and theology use the same tools. Both think in a fundamental way about human existence and both are faced with the two moments of the one truth. Moreover, theology does not have, in Barth’s view, any firm ground by which it can be distinguished from philosophy. It cannot prove its claim to be human knowledge based upon God’s revelation, because all it can offer is human knowledge in human categories. Theology takes place in the same space as philosophy. This means that theology is constantly exposed to the temptation to become philosophy, i.e., to become theosophy — to trust fully its own human capacity to know and its ability to formulate and solve questions and problems. It cannot protect itself completely from this temptation. This temptation goes with its character of being a human act, a human utterance about the word God has spoken. Still, Barth argues, it must venture to speak about this divine word. How,
then, is theology able to do so? How is theology, being only human reflection, an indirect tracing of God’s word, able to start its reflection on the side of God’s revelation and not on the human side? Where can theology find the criterion for what revelation is? How does the theologian become aware of God’s act of making himself known? In order to acquire some clarity on these questions, we will end this section by taking a closer look at Barth’s concept of revelation.

Barth defines theology as the knowledge (Wissenschaft) of God as the object of the proclamation of the church. The church proclaims God on the basis of his Word which he speaks to us. Theology regards itself as called to its task by God — as the task of people to whom God is proclaimed. This means that knowledge of God begins with God’s acting, his act of making himself known to us. We cannot know God by ourselves — if we claim to do so, we mirror only ourselves. We know God only because he makes himself known to us. This knowledge, which we receive because God gives it, is not partial but comprises the whole truth. In his revelation God makes himself known as he is. He is fully present in his revelation — it is not just some faint reflection of God.

Yet, as human beings, we cannot know God as he knows himself. When God makes himself known to us, we receive a knowledge that differs from God’s self-knowledge. Barth expresses this difference in terms of the self-humiliation, self-alienation or concealment of God: God humiliates himself in taking on the form of the creature in order to make himself known. Thus, his revelation implies concealment: God conceals himself in creaturely form in order to reveal himself. This does not mean that the creature as such automatically reveals God. It reveals him only insofar as God wants to reveal himself in it. This means that we cannot ourselves choose certain objects as means for finding God. We cannot have control over the objects in which God reveals himself as we have control over the objects in which God reveals himself.

38 See note 1 above.
39 In a passage in KD II/1 on the knowledge of God Barth argues that there is no quantitative limitation to our knowledge of God. Neither can it be separated into different parts (KD II/1, 56, CD 52). Cf. Miskotte’s remark that Barth rejects taking a systematic starting point in one of the dogmatic loci, e.g. Christology or the sovereignty of God. Rather, each locus presents in a contraction the whole of his theology (K.H. Miskotte, “Kleine preludes en fantasieën over Karl Barth’s Kirchliche Domgatik” (1955/1961), in: A. Geense and H. Stoevesandt (eds), *Verzameld Werk, Vol. II: Karl Barth, inspiratie en vertolking: inleidingen, essays, briefwisseling* (Kampen: Kok 1987) 104, 105).
40 KD II/1, 66, CD 61.
41 E.g. KD II/1, 59-60, CD 55.
over “normal” objects.\footnote{Busch, \textit{Die Grosse Leidenschaft}, op. cit., 81, 82.} We cannot have control over the knowledge of God — it has to be granted to us. In his free grace God makes himself an object of our human knowledge, i.e. grants us the gift of faith. The summary answer, then, to the questions above may be that knowledge of God is a gift, grace. This answer does not seem fully satisfying. How do we know that we have received this gift? I think that Barth would argue that we never know for certain but that we have to venture our theological enterprise. We may — no, we must — venture it on the basis that our knowledge can testify to God only if God uses our knowledge to this purpose.\footnote{“Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie,” Gesamtausgabe Vol. III, op. cit., 391.}

The brokenness of theology was said to consist in its lack of completeness, evidence and a comprehensive system. From Barth’s reflections on the relation between philosophy and theology the origin for this brokenness becomes clear: it lies in the gift character of all knowledge of God. All knowledge of God, and hence all theology, is based on God’s gift of knowledge of himself. We cannot have control over this gift. We cannot develop a method that leads to knowledge of God or a system in which it is presented in its entirety. We cannot even say with certainty or prove with evidence that something reveals God. Because all knowledge of God is based on a gift, it is broken. This is a brokenness in comparison to our common ideas, methods and systems concerning true knowledge. We must abandon these ideas in order to be able to take our starting point in what God reveals about himself.

\section*{5.2. The “Break” in the Relationship between Creator and Creature}

While one may, erroneously, forget about this brokenness in theological reflection on many subjects, one can hardly miss it where nothingness is concerned. Barth argues that theology’s broken character becomes pre-eminently visible in its dealing with nothingness. Why is this? Because nothingness is the “break (\textit{Bruch}) in the relationship between Creator and creature.”\footnote{KD III/3, 332, 333, CD 294.} Nothingness may be called the origin of the brokenness of theological reflection. Nothingness as the break between God and the creature affects our knowledge of God: we can know God only “in the shadow of this break.”\footnote{KD III/3 333, CD 294.} The moment we attain knowledge of God through his revelation, we also become aware of this nothingness that
opposes God. In this sense theology is “bound up with nothingness.” This bond causes the inevitable brokenness of theological reflection. Barth emphasises that it is, of course, especially important to be aware of this when dealing with the topic of God’s relation to nothingness. Here in particular theology should not “impose or simulate a system.”

How does this explanation of the broken character by referring to nothingness relate to what we found above? There the gift character of our knowledge of God was presented as the cause of theology’s brokenness. How does this gift character relate to nothingness as the origin of the brokenness? In the reflections analysed above Barth did not refer to nothingness. Perhaps the tracing back of theology’s brokenness to nothingness can be seen as further clarification of the general brokenness that results from the gift character. Thus God’s gift of knowledge appears as a gift to a creature that is separated from God by a break.

Whether this interpretation of the relation between gift character and nothingness is correct must become clear in my further analysis of Barth’s notion of nothingness. In this analysis we have to find out how Barth’s broken theology operates “in practice” — for nothingness is the litmus test of theology. How does Barth avoid the danger of which he has warned us, i.e. that of starting from human presuppositions, questions and problems? What does a broken account of nothingness look like? In order to answer these questions I will first approach nothingness from Barth’s reflections on God’s relation to it, which appears pre-eminently in the act of creation. Subsequently I will deal with Barth’s analysis of nothingness from the perspective of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Finally, I will focus on the crucial point of the reality of nothingness and relate this to the characterisation of theology as broken.

5.2.1. God’s Negative Relation to Nothingness

Barth’s starting point in discussing nothingness is the “simple recognition” that, also when nothingness is concerned, “God is Lord over all.” This simple recognition is Barth’s summary of the starting point of his doctrine

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47 “dem Nichtigen verhaftet” (KD III/3, 333, CD 294).
48 KD III/3 333, CD 294.
49 “Here if anywhere theology must set an example for its procedure generally, corresponding to its object in broken thoughts and utterances” (KD III/3, 333, CD 294).
50 KD III/3, 330, 331, 332, CD 291, 292, 293. Cf. also KD III/3, 343, CD 302: “Yet God Himself comprehends, envisages and controls it [nothingness]. This is the insight which in the context of the doctrine of providence we seek to attain in this whole section.”
of God's providence, which precedes the chapter on nothingness. Still, the discussion of nothingness differs from that of God's providence. Although this simple recognition must also be at the centre when dealing with nothingness, it is impossible to follow the approach of the foregoing parts here. This approach consisted in "drawing straight lines from above, i.e., by thinking and speaking in direct statements concerning the action of the Creator on and with His creature." In view of nothingness, "the doctrine of God's providence must be investigated afresh." Barth does not explain precisely why he discusses nothingness after the doctrine of God's providence. He simply starts off the chapter by stating: "There is opposition and resistance to God's world-dominion." He does not explain how one knows of this resistance. Subsequently, he infers from this description of nothingness the point of view from which we should approach nothingness. From the fact that nothingness is opposed to God follows that we can know nothingness only by first of all understanding God's relation to it. This means that nothingness cannot be treated separately as if it were something independent. In Barth's view, nothingness does not exist autonomously, independent of God. A second consequence of the fact that nothingness is something that opposes God is that it must not be regarded as principally a human affair. We do not gain insight immediately into Barth's reasons for approaching nothingness as something that is opposed to God and not as an independent power or a human affair. Let us investigate these aspects further.

The chapter on nothingness is included in the four-volume doctrine of creation of Barth's Church Dogmatics. Hence, it is first of all God's act

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51 In his introduction to Part III/3 of the Church Dogmatics Barth emphasises that he deals with the problem of nothingness in a separate section and not like the "older doctrine of providence ... in direct connexion with the positive exposition" of providence (KD III/3, VI, CD xii).
53 KD III/3, 327, CD 289.
54 From the introduction one receives the impression that the reason Barth goes into nothingness in the context of the doctrine of providence lies in the example of the classical dogmatic treatment "De providentia Dei circa malum" (KD III/3, VI, CD xii). But he does not refer to this in the chapter on nothingness itself.
55 This is the first sentence of the chapter on nothingness (KD III/3, 327, CD 289).
56 "We are not now dealing with the break itself, but with God's relation to it, with his providence and the extent to which it comprehends this break as well" (KD III/3, 333, CD 294).
57 "It would be untenable from a Christian point of view to ascribe [to nothingness] autonomous existence independent of God ..." (KD III/3, 407, CD 353).
of creation that throws light on the origin, nature and status of nothingness. Nothingness originates in God’s act of creating. If there were no creation, there would be no nothingness. But this should not be understood in the sense that nothingness is part of creation. In the act of creation God does not create nothingness but separates his creature from it. He chooses his creation and thereby rejects every other possibility outside of this creation. In the words of Genesis 1: 3-9, by separating light from darkness, the waters above from the waters below etc., God separates his creation from chaos. This separation therefore has a positive and a negative side. The positive choice in favour of creation means a rejection of nothingness. Nothingness is the possibility that God ignores and despises by creating the world. As a consequence, God’s relationship to this element differs fundamentally from his relationship to his creature. His creature is comprehended within his fatherly lordship, which means that God preserves, accompanies and rules his creature. But God’s relation to nothingness cannot be understood in these terms.

Nonetheless, in this providential relationship of God to his creature — characterised as his fatherly lordship — God is also related to nothingness. In this respect, divine preservation (Erhalten), the first characteristic of

58 KD III/3, 84, CD 74.
59 E.g. KD III/3, 328, CD 290.
60 This idea of a choice reminds one of Leibniz’ idea that God chooses to create the best possible world out of an infinite number of possible worlds. Barth speaks of an “infinite range of all the possibilities God passed over and did not actualise,” which entails that nothingness is infinite (KD III/3, 88, CD 77). Cf. also KD III/1, 112, 119, CD 102, 108.
61 Cf. e.g. KD III/3, 84, 85, CD 74, 75. This separation can be seen more precisely as the succession of creating, approving, dividing and calling (KD III/3, 87, 92, CD 77, 81). In Barth’s view, nothingness, the negative or non-chosen part of this separation, is already indicated in Genesis 1:2 in the images of the “waste and void earth” and the “darkness upon the deep.” All these images have mythical overtones, according to Barth. In the following verses this mythical language is not maintained. Here the act of creation is depicted, while verse 2 depicts the world that is left behind by the act of creation. This exegesis is confirmed, according to Barth, by the past tense that is used in verse 2: “And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Here the world is sketched as it would look if God had not spoken his creative word. Barth calls this world “chaos” (KD III/1, 111-121, CD 101-110).
62 E.g. KD III/1, 119, CD 108.
63 The original German word for “comprehends” is “umfaßt” (KD III/3, 327, CD 289). Barth sticks to the traditional dogmatic arrangement of the doctrine of providence by explaining it in terms of the notions of divine preservation (conservatio), accompaniment (concursus) and rule (gubernatio) (KD III/3, 69 CD 60; cf. also Otto Weber, Karl Barths Kirchliche Dogmatik. Ein einführender Bericht (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1989 2) 127).
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divine providence, is most important. This preservation means that God wants his creatures to exist in time without perishing, in the context that he has created. The creature, for its part, needs this divine preservation. This must be understood from Barth’s exegesis of creation in terms of a separation or distinction between creation and nothingness. God preserves this distinction after the moment of creation. This means that God preserves or maintains his creation “against overthrow by das Nichtige.” Nothingness is thus, in Barth’s view, a continuous threat to God’s creation. God has power over this threat, but human beings do not. For the creature is not divine; rather, it lives next to this nothingness. It would be overwhelmed by nothingness if God did not save and maintain it in his divine preservation. Nothingness has this power to pervert creation because it is that which is rejected by God. This power should not be understood in the sense of some counter-government that can compete with God’s rule. God alone rules, which “means an end of chaos and all its sinister powers.”

What obtains for God’s act of creation obtains for all acts of God: they are not only positive but also negative. God’s acting is grounded in his election. Therefore, it always entails a separation between his good work, which he elects, and that which is rejected. God’s acting has the character of a judgement. Nothingness is thus not only that which God negates in his act of creating but in all his actions. “Nothingness is that from which God separates Himself and in face of which He asserts Himself and exerts His positive will.” In this connection Barth speaks of God’s “Yes” and “No.” Nothingness is that which God does not will, which he rejects: “it lives only by the fact that it is that which God does not will.” From this “ontic peculiarity” follows the character of nothingness: it is evil (das Böse). By this explicit identification

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64 Cf. especially KD III/3, 83-90, CD 73-79.
65 KD III/3, 70, 73, CD 61, 63.
66 KD III/3, 84 CD 73. Note that in the English translation das Nichtige is translated here, strangely enough, as “that which is not” and not as “nothingness” without any clarification or justification.
67 KD III/3, 87, CD 76.
68 KD III/3, 86, CD 76.
69 KD III/3, 179, CD 158.
70 KD III/3, 405, CD 351.
71 KD III/3, 405, CD 351.
72 KD III/3, 406, CD 352.
73 KD III/3, 407, CD 353. I will come back to this remark and its consequences for the interpretation of nothingness as evil below (see p. 238, note 221).
of nothingness with evil Barth points out that nothingness is contrary to God’s grace, his “Yes.”

Barth seems to go a step further when he says that God is Lord both on the right hand and on the left. For this lordship on the left means that God “is the basis and Lord of nothingness too.” By speaking in these terms of “lordship,” Barth emphasises the dependence of nothingness on God: nothingness receives both its existence and its power from God. In line with this dependence we must even say that nothingness serves God, although it does not will to do so. Nothingness is thus the negative result of God’s act, God’s opus alienum which is opposed to his opus proprium. However, these two works of God are not equal. Nothingness has no substance and no perpetuity. It does not exist for its own sake but only as a temporary side effect of God’s opus proprium, his work of grace. God does not enter into a covenant with it. It will cease to exist the moment God fulfils his opus proprium. Yet, precisely because it is the object of God’s opus alienum, nothingness is real and powerful within the limits set by God’s rejection of it. Nothingness is not something that does not exist. God takes it seriously and as such it has existence. Again, this existence must be understood as totally different from that of God and that of the creature: nothingness does not belong to creation.

A final consequence that follows from the fact that nothingness is God’s opus alienum is that “its conquest, removal and abolition are primarily and properly God’s own affair.” Nothingness is “first and
foremost the problem of God Himself.” Here we find again Barth’s starting point: that nothingness is a power that resists God and that we know it by understanding God’s relation to it. The contention with nothingness is not a human affair but God’s contention in which human beings can only become “co-belligerents,” summoned to and armed for this contention by God himself. By itself, the creature can never contend against nothingness. Only God can overcome nothingness — including where it affects creation. And God will overcome it. When the work of God’s grace, his opus proprium, achieves its purpose, nothingness will come to an end. Moreover, this elimination of nothingness has already occurred in Jesus Christ. We will return to this point that nothingness has already been overcome by God below. Now, we must first investigate the consequences for our knowledge of the fact that nothingness only exists and ceases to exist as the object of God’s acting.

As the object of God’s “No,” nothingness does not exist in the way the creature exists. This specific, non-creaturely status of nothingness has consequences for our knowledge of it. Precisely because nothingness exists in a different way than creation the creature cannot discover and know the existence of nothingness by itself, in the sense of natural knowledge. However, Barth emphasises, the creature easily forgets about this. Because the creature experiences nothingness as an “objective reality” it starts to interpret these experiences by itself. It does not notice that these interpretations are bound to become misinterpretations because they are not founded in the revelation of nothingness in God’s relationship towards it. Barth does not just regard this as a natural inclination of the creature which results from the experience of nothingness as a creaturely problem. He argues that this pretension to be able to discover and know nothingness “of itself and at its own discretion” is a sign of the “malignity and corruption” of these interpretations. Here we observe again Barth’s attention for the problem of knowing nothingness and the dangers related to it. These are not just dangers in the sense that the right or orthodox doctrine is threatened; the misinterpretations are themselves “evil” (böse). And they arise if we start our reflection from our own human experiences. This reminds us of Barth’s objections to theological reflections “from below.”

81 KD III/3, 409, 410, CD 355.
83 KD III/3, 404, CD 350.
84 “ihre böse und verderbliche Natur” (KD III/3, 404-405, CD 351).
As regards nothingness, Barth’s remedy against the danger of misinterpretations is to start from God’s attitude towards nothingness: then it is revealed as a power that opposes God and can only be overcome by God. Still, he acknowledges that the problem is not completely solved by starting from this view. Even if we start from the “simple recognition that God is Lord over all” misinterpretations of this lordship are very likely to occur. A first pair of errors is that of emphasising either God’s responsibility for the existence of nothingness — thereby exonerating the creature — or the creature’s responsibility for it — thereby turning God into a passive bystander. The former view ignores the fact that God’s lordship is not affected by nothingness: nothingness is not a part of God’s positive acting. The latter, on the other hand, ignores the fact that God actually rules over nothingness in majesty. For Barth, it is not in line with the Christian view to think that God remains unmoved by nothingness, and, thus, that it is the responsibility of human beings to fight it. Again, these erroneous views must not be understood as “only” a departure from orthodox Christian doctrine. Rather, in these views nothingness itself triumphs. Another aspect that is easily misinterpreted is the status of nothingness. One can easily see it as more monstrous than it is or underestimate it by considering it to have been fully defeated by God. The first attitude may be inspired by the recognition of nothingness as a power that resists God and the second by the appropriation of the knowledge of God’s victory over nothingness in Christ as something that we have at our disposal. The risks of overestimating or underestimating the power of nothingness are constantly lurking in the background.

In discussing the dangers of thinking from creaturely experience Barth is again demarcating the right knowledge of nothingness that he characterised as broken. This broken knowledge is based on the recognition of nothingness as a power that resists God. Because God is Lord over all, nothingness should subsequently be seen as dependent on God. But this is not dependence in the way of the creation but in a purely negative sense: nothingness depends on God only to the extent that it is rejected by God. However, if we start our reflection on nothingness “from below,” from our own human experience of it we can easily misinterpret it as something we should fight ourselves, or as too great or too small, etc. The difference between these two ways of thinking about nothingness may

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85 KD III/3, 330, CD 292.
87 KD III/3, 331-332, CD 293.
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seem quite clear. Still, it is not entirely clear for all aspects of Barth’s doctrine what their basis in revelation is. Neither is the basis of all Barth’s criticism of other approaches as starting “from below” completely understandable.

As an example of these obscurities, we may think of the concrete example of misinterpretation that is found in theodicy.88 As we have seen, this misinterpretation is in Barth’s view the result of another way in which we may think “from below,” i.e. the way of philosophy. This creates an abstract approach to nothingness. This abstractness appears in mutually exclusive alternatives of either this or that in which the theodicy problem is presented, e.g.: “God is either good, but obviously neither divine nor omnipotent in relation to this element, or He is divine and omnipotent, but obviously not good in relation to this element.”89 These questions “from without” do not take into account that God’s rule is revealed to us in a specific history: “the history of the covenant, grace and salvation.”90

However, it is not clear from Barth’s argument in which aspects precisely this error of abstractness consists. Does it lie in the mutually excluding alternatives in which the problem is formulated? Or is the problem that this approach looses itself in “academic discussions” (künstliche Vermittlungen) that are of no real value to theology?91 But questions concerning God’s goodness or omnipotence are also likely to arise from Barth’s reflections on nothingness “from within.” For example, one wonders why God leaves power to nothingness if it threatens his opus proprium. Moreover, why does it still have power if it is rejected by God? What kind of power is this? Where does it appear? Would Barth regard questions such as these also as illegitimate and coming “from without”? But they seem to follow from his own account of nothingness.92 On closer examination, Barth’s distinction between thinking “from within” and “from without” does not seem as clear as it may appear at first sight.

89 KD III/3, CD 365. Barth mentions two other examples of such formulations. “The creature is either good, but obviously imperfect in relation to this element, or perfect, but obviously good only in a limited sense in this regard.... This co-existence [of Creator and creature] is either orderly, but not good in relation to this element,...”
90 KD III/3, 422, CD 365.
91 Barth reproaches the “older orthodoxy” for this (KD III/3, 422, 423, CD 365, 366).
92 Cf. Adriaanse’s conclusion that even though a formal theodicy is not found in Barth’s thinking, the outlines of a theodicy can be drawn from Barth’s reflections on human suffering and especially from his notion of nothingness (Adriaanse, Hendrik Johan, “Menschliches Leiden nach Karl Barth,” in: M.M. Olivetti (ed.), Teodicea Oggi? Archivio di Filosofia 56 (Padova: Cedam 1988, 147-161) 158).
Perhaps we will gain more clarity if we turn to what Barth regards as the opposite of the abstract approach to nothingness: the approach that seeks the problem of nothingness “where it is raised in its true form and is authentically answered,” i.e. in the “mighty act of salvation in Jesus Christ as attested by Holy Scripture.”

5.2.2. God’s Struggle and Conquest of Nothingness in Jesus Christ

Thus far I have not explicitly mentioned what Barth calls the “objective ground of the knowledge” (Erkenntnisgrund) of nothingness: Jesus Christ. I analysed Barth’s view of nothingness as following from God’s relation to it. Still, for our knowledge of this relation the revelation in Jesus Christ is indispensable. Thus, although I did not yet mention it, this knowledge of nothingness in Jesus Christ is, in fact, primary for Barth. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is the “source of all Christian knowledge” to which theology must return. Barth does not just mention this here to repeat the basic conviction of his theology. He also elucidates why we only gain knowledge of nothingness in Jesus Christ by giving three reasons (Gründe) — one formal and two material reasons. The first, formal reason is very important with respect to the problem of the knowledge of nothingness. It concerns Barth’s statement that nothingness is “primarily and properly known in Jesus Christ and acknowledged by him.” In Jesus Christ God reveals that nothingness is his own enemy which opposes and contradicts him. In Jesus Christ God engages in combat against this hostile power and conquers it. Our human knowledge of nothingness is dependent on this knowledge and therefore indirect and secondary. The second reason that our knowledge of nothingness must be grounded in Jesus Christ is related to what Barth calls the concrete and most important form of nothingness, i.e. sin. Precisely as

93 KD III/3, 423, CD 366.
95 KD III/3, 342, 344, CD 302, 303. Barth also calls Jesus Christ “die Mitte des Evan- geliums” (e.g. KD III/3, 349, CD 307; the English translation translates the German Mitte by “heart”). On Jesus Christ as the central revelation of God, cf. e.g. Barth’s remark that “everything else that is to be learned from the Bible may be learned in nuce here” (KD III/1, 26, CD 25).
96 Barth makes this distinction between formal and material in KD III/3, 349, CD 307. The reasons themselves are mentioned in KD III/3, 344-355, CD 303-312.
97 KD III/3, 349, CD 307.
98 E.g. KD III/3, 345, CD 304.
99 KD III/3, 347, CD 305.
regards sin, the difference between relying on the knowledge in Jesus Christ and relying on our own human knowledge is crucial. In the latter case sin is seen “only generally as an aberration from God and disobedience to his will.” 100 This view never brings us to the decisive point of knowledge of sin: the acknowledgement that we as human beings sin by repudiating human life as God meant it to be, the life in his grace. This knowledge, this recognition of our responsibility for the insult to God is revealed only in Jesus Christ. The incarnation reveals God’s mercy and grace towards his creation. God wants to become a creature. He does not reject his creature because of its sin but affirms it in spite of this sin. He even forgives this sin. In this way he shows that human beings are truly guilty of their sin. It cannot be attributed to their human weakness or imperfection.101 They could and should have acted differently, in accordance with God’s mercy. From this moral form of nothingness — i.e. sin — Barth distinguishes its physical forms. Also as regards these forms, Barth holds that we know them only through Jesus Christ.102 In him we discover that these physical forms include the suffering of “real” evil (Übel) and “real” death, i.e. evil and death as opposed to the totality of God’s creation.103 This is the third reason that we only know nothingness in Jesus Christ.

The three reasons Barth gives reveal three aspects of nothingness which we can know only in Jesus Christ and not by ourselves. Still, it is not yet entirely clear how we discover nothingness in Jesus Christ as God’s enemy, as real sin, suffering and death. Which aspects of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ show this? To understand this it is necessary to take into account Barth’s general view of the incarnation. For Barth, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is crucial for theology because it shows who God is: he is the creator of the world, who is not alone but who takes the initiative to unite himself with the creature. From the incarnation it is clear that the creature is established and determined by God.104 It reveals that this is the world willed by God.105 “When God Himself became a creature in Jesus Christ, He confirmed His creation in its totality as an act of His wisdom and mercy, as His good creation

100 KD III /3, 349, CD 308.
101 KD III /3, 352, CD 309.
102 KD III /3, 352-355, CD 310-312.
103 KD III /3, 353, CD 310 (see also p. 224, note 157 below).
104 E.g. KD III/1, 26, CD 25.
105 KD III/3, 342, CD 301.
THE "BREAK" IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATURE

without blemish or blame." But this is not the only thing that is revealed in Jesus Christ. In him it also becomes clear that the incarnation was necessary to defeat and destroy nothingness. For, although the creation is good, it is gravely threatened by an alien power: the power of nothingness. In order to engage in combat with this power God adopts the state of the creature under the life-threatening power of nothingness. In this way God exposes himself to the temptation of this power. The combat is, of course, not an equal combat, but the contest of God, the Lord of nothingness, with that which he has rejected. By becoming flesh, God conquers nothingness. By becoming a creature himself he acknowledges that the fall of the creature also affects him. The power to which the creature gives in is not just an affair of creation but an affair of God himself.

But which aspects in particular of the incarnation show this combat of God with nothingness? In the chapter on nothingness Barth does not go into details about this combat. But Jesus’ violent death is certainly one of the most revealing moments as regards this combat. True nothingness, as distinguished from the human idea of nothingness, is “that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which He defeated there.”

Barth relates the opposition and hostility that the Son of God encounters

106 KD III/3, 344, CD 303.
107 Barth uses the word “necessary” (nötig) two times in this context: KD III/3, 344, 346, CD 303, 304. Cf.: “Nothingness is the ‘reality’ on whose account (i.e., against which) God Himself willed to become a creature in the creaturely world, yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it” (KD III/3, 346, CD 305).
108 KD III/3, 344, CD 303.
109 This may sound self-evident. Barth, however, shows the particularity of God’s free decision to engage in combat with nothingness by contrasting it with another conceivable scenario, the idea of a “creation of wrath” (KD III/3, 89, CD 78). E.g., God may be represented as a being who creates something and then immediately withdraws from this creation, thus abandoning the field to nothingness. Or one may think of a God who abandons his creature at a certain moment, simply because he has had enough of it. These seem to be legitimate views. The only reason, Barth argues, that they are to be rejected is that we know from God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ that God affirms his creature and does not allow nothingness to deny this creature fully. He does not want to abandon the creature in its conflict with chaos. The way in which God affirms and preserves the creature is not self-evident either. He could have done so from “the safe height of a supreme world-governor” (KD III/3, 89, CD 79). But in Jesus Christ it is revealed that this is not God’s intention: he takes up the “cause of the creature against the non-existent [Nichts]” in the “closest possible proximity, with the greatest possible directness,” by becoming a creature himself.
110 In Part IV of the Church Dogmatics that deals with the doctrine of reconciliation Barth reveals more precisely which aspects of the incarnation show this combat with nothingness.
111 KD III/3, 346, CD 305.
to the power of nothingness. By confronting this power, by assuming the insult of sin in the person of Jesus Christ, God is able to overcome nothingness. This is shown first and foremost in the violent death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His death on the cross was the “death of condemnation.” He suffered this death “for the forgiveness of the sins of many,” as stated in the New Testament. By becoming flesh God judged the sin attached to this flesh. In Jesus’ death on the cross the darkness of the chaos becomes real for one moment in order to be overcome. Thus he restored the right of his creature. But, in this way he also conquered the power of nothingness, which God reveals in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In addition to this most important confrontation with nothingness, the miracles and acts of Jesus also reveal him to be the conqueror of the power of nothingness. Jesus cures the sick. He destroys the source of their suffering. In these aspects God’s combat with nothingness is shown.

It has become clear that Barth’s solution to the problem of knowing nothingness is that theology should start from the revelation in Jesus Christ. Here we discover nothingness in a way we could never have figured out for ourselves. In this sense Jesus Christ is the only “objective ground of the knowledge” of nothingness. In him we know it as God’s own enemy which he fights and conquers. This means we that we must always regard nothingness “in retrospect” of what happened in Jesus Christ. Nothingness has already been overcome. Yet Barth also argues that nothingness still threatens creation even after it has been defeated in Christ. How must this be understood? Barth argues that we must also interpret nothingness “in prospect” of the second coming of Jesus Christ. At that time “the refutation and termination” of nothingness will be “generally revealed.” Until then the victory over nothingness will not yet be complete. What does this mean for its status? How must it be understood that nothingness is still a real threat to creation even though it has

112 “Der Tod eines Verdammten” (KD III/3, 355, CD 312).
113 KD III/3, 355, CD 312.
114 Barth refers to Romans 8:3 (KD III/3, 349, CD 307).
115 In KD III/1 Barth mentions the moment when Jesus cries “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” as the only moment in which the darkness of the power of chaos, which God rejected in creating the world, becomes real (KD III/1, 121, CD 109).
116 KD III/3, 345, CD 304.
117 KD III/3, 355, CD 312.
118 KD III/3, 354, CD 311.
119 KD III/3, 423, CD 366.
120 KD III/3, 423, 424, CD 366.
already been “objectively defeated” in Jesus Christ? As the final point of Barth’s doctrine of nothingness we will take a closer look at the specific reality of nothingness.

5.2.3. The Reality of Nothingness

In spite of its status as a rejected, past and unsubstantial power, nothingness is in Barth’s view not something to which we no longer need to pay attention or which may now be ignored. For it is also, in a very specific way, real and dangerous. Barth even titles the final section of the chapter on nothingness “The Reality of Nothingness.” In Barth’s discussion of the reality of nothingness, two different perspectives may be discerned. Again, he determines this real side of nothingness first of all on the basis of God’s relation to it. From this he concludes that it is a reality insofar as God “takes it into account” and is “concerned with it.” In Jesus Christ we see that God takes it seriously as his own enemy. But this must not be understood in the sense that nothingness is a power that God cannot control. Although it is his enemy, God is Lord over nothingness. Nothingness lives only from God’s “No,” and is thus dependent on God. Nothingness has no power that was not given to it by God. It is real only insofar as it is rejected by God. Moreover, the struggle with nothingness in Jesus Christ leads to its defeat; its power is broken.

Subsequently, Barth also approaches the reality of nothingness from a very different perspective, i.e. not as following from God’s relation to it but as something human beings still experience. At the very end of the chapter on nothingness Barth remarks that the “existence, menace, corruption, disturbance and destructiveness of nothingness … may still be
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seen.” 126 We should not attribute any “ultimate power and significance” to this but only a “dangerous semblance of them.” This semblance is subsequently related to a mistaken observation from the human side. Barth argues:

What it [i.e. the kingdom of nothingness] still is in the world, it is in virtue of the blindness of our eyes and the cover which is still over us, obscuring the prospect of the kingdom of God, the only kingdom which is already established and has no kingdom of evil besides it. 127

This blindness relates to the fact that the “final revelation” of the destruction of nothingness has not yet taken place. Until this eschatological moment of “the victory of Jesus Christ” God “permits” his creature to be “a prey to nothingness.” 128 This notion of “God’s permission” expresses that God is Lord over nothingness also in this respect: “nothingness can have even its semblance of validity only under the decree of God.” 129

The second perspective from which Barth approaches the reality of nothingness is more difficult to understand than the first. Barth does not clarify precisely the aspects on which this idea of the semblance of reality is based. He only mentions briefly that we are still awaiting the final revelation, the fulfilment of God’s opus proprium, the second coming of Christ. Apparently, this implies that we still experience the threat of nothingness. But why precisely this is so and especially in which respects this threat is still experienced is not clear. Barth’s interest does not seem to lie in the ways in which nothingness still threatens the creature. His reflections focus on the fact that this is the threat of a power that is in fact already defeated, that only bears the semblance of a power. Thus, the rejected and conquered reality of nothingness, which follows from the first perspective, seems to be much more important for Barth than the semblance of reality we experience until the second coming of Christ.

126 The German original again seems stronger than the English translation I cited: “…seinem wahrhaftig noch immer bemerkbaren Dasein …” (KD III/3, 424, CD 367).
127 KD III/3, 424, CD 367 (italics are mine). I changed the end of English translation of this sentence, that translates the German “… vermöge der Decke, die jetzt noch über uns ist und uns den Ausblick auf das Reich Gottes verwehrt, das als das einzige schon gekommen und aufgerichtet ist und kein Reich des Bösen neben sich hat” imprecisely with “…the cover which is still over us, obscuring the prospect of the kingdom of God already established as the only kingdom undisputed by evil.” For a parallel statement to that of the “blindness of our eyes” cf. KD III/3, 419, CD 363: “In the light of Jesus Christ there is no sense in which it can be affirmed that nothingness has any objective existence, that it continues except for our still blinded eyes ….”
129 KD III/3, 424, CD 367.
Now that we have analysed the important aspects of Barth’s reflections on nothingness we must return to Barth’s claim of brokenness. It is remarkable that, although Barth refers to this notion of brokenness quite emphatically at the beginning of the chapter, he does not return to it explicitly. He does not try very hard to show or prove the brokenness of his reflections in an explicit way. Rather, the opposite is true: on the face of it, Barth seems to give a quite systematic account of nothingness. He does not emphasise gaps in the knowledge of nothingness. He does not indicate boundaries that are reached in the understanding of nothingness. It is, apparently, up to the reader to discover the brokenness implicit in his statements. Where then does this brokenness appear?

We have seen that Barth emphasises Jesus Christ as the only “objective ground of knowledge” of nothingness over against knowledge based on our own experience of nothingness. This distinction corresponds to the opposition between reflection “from within” and “from without”. Barth’s reflection “from within” reveals nothingness as God’s enemy with which he fights and conquers. This combat is a combat of the “Lord over all” with a power which only lives from his “No.” In which sense may this knowledge of nothingness be called broken? First of all, this brokenness may be seen in the lack of correspondence to the way in which we usually reflect on things. Usually, we start from our human intuitions regarding things and try to develop methods to test our hypotheses. Barth emphasises that his knowledge of nothingness is not at all based on our human assumptions or insight; it only becomes clear in Jesus Christ. Thus, this knowledge seems broken in that it is based on God’s gift of knowledge and not on our own conjectures, evidence or systematisations. As a result, this knowledge does not meet our usual standards of knowledge.

However, Barth also explained the brokenness of theology as caused by nothingness itself, the break between Creator and creature. As a result, theology is bound up with nothingness; it can know God only in

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130 Barth seems to acknowledge this when he remarks in a discussion on nothingness with G.C. Berkouwer that he “is not merely speaking of its [i.e. nothingness’] obscure, unfathomable and baffling nature from the standpoint of human knowledge, but saying something very definite about its nature and existence as though it were not at all concealed from human knowledge” (KD IV/3, 202, CD 176). It is “not arrogant nor dangerous,” in Barth’s view, “to seek the intellectus fidei in this respect instead of renouncing all understanding, and thus to strive at least for a true and clear conception” (KD IV/3, 202, CD 177).

131 See pp. 198, 199 above.

132 See pp. 204, 205 above.
the shadow of the break of nothingness. This explanation may now be clarified by the remarks on the reality of nothingness in the time before the “final revelation.” This is the time in which we are still blind and covered so that we cannot yet see that the kingdom of God is already established. Until the “final revelation of the destruction of nothingness” it is “not yet visible or recognisable” that nothingness is conquered. Still, we know that nothingness is conquered from God’s revelation. This knowledge may be called broken: it is not something we see or recognise, not something we experience.

How then do we experience nothingness if not as something that is past? In which sense is it still a reality for us? Barth does not systematically elaborate on this reality for our blinded eyes. But it seems most likely that we experience nothingness as more powerful than Barth regards it to be on the basis of what is revealed in Jesus Christ. The designation “audacious” by which Barth characterises the recognition of the conquered statues of nothingness seems to confirm this. Still, Barth’s aim does not seem to be to point out the tension between what is revealed in Jesus Christ and what we still experience because of the blindness of our eyes. He focuses on the former and mentions the latter only briefly.

Therefore, one wonders whether Barth justly claims brokenness for these reflections, for this brokenness seems to relate precisely to the power which nothingness still has, to the reality that it is for our blinded eyes, in spite of the fact that it has been overcome. Does Barth not focus too much on the conquered status of nothingness? Would a broken reflection on nothingness not have to take its defeat and reality equally into account? These questions become even more pressing if one realises the enormous contrast between these two aspects. How can a reality that is rejected and defeated by God, that always lives only from God’s “No,” that is “from the very first that which is past” and real only insofar God struggles with it, be a perilous power for a creature that is preserved, accompanied and ruled by God? Should Barth not go into this problem more deeply? In order to test these interpretations and criticisms further, I will turn to two examples of important misinterpretations with which Barth deals. In these views of nothingness we may perhaps discover what the “unbroken” reflections comprise to which Barth is opposed. This may throw light on the value of Barth’s broken approach.

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133 KD III/3, 424, CD 367.
134 KD III/3, 424, CD 367.
135 “So überkühn das klingen mag …” (KD III/3, 419, CD 363).
136 KD III/3, 417, CD 360.
5.3. Misinterpretations of Nothingness

5.3.1. Nothingness is not the Shadowy Side of Creation

Barth devotes a separate section of his chapter on nothingness to what he calls “a serious confusion which has been of far reaching effect in the history of theology.” Barth alludes here to the misinterpretation in which nothingness is confused with the “shadowy side of creation” (Schattenseite). The term “shadowy side” indicates those aspects of life which people usually experience as bad, nasty, horrible, or dreadful. This shadowy side is present in addition to the light side. Barth thus depicts this view of creation as follows:

In creation there is not only a Yes but also a No; not only a height but also an abyss; not only clarity but also obscurity; not only progress and continuation but also impediment and limitation; not only growth but also decay; not only opulence, but also indigence; not only beauty but also ashes; not only beginning but also end; not only value but also worthlessness.

Before he has even explained what precisely the confusion is, Barth is busy refuting it. His argument in this refutation was already mentioned above: God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ is an affirmation of the goodness of creation. It affirms the creation as willed by God in this form. The fact, which Barth does not want to ignore, that there are also negative things in this creation does not alter its goodness one bit. In its antithesis of a light and a shadowy side, creation is perfect. What happens in the confusion of nothingness with the shadowy side of creation is that this shadowy side is wrongly judged as something that is directed against God’s will, as an anomaly which is incompatible with the goodness of creation. This interpretation is supported by our incomprehension of the justice that is to be found in the fact that some people must live in the shadow, while others live in the light. To this incomprehension Barth objects: “For all we can tell, may not His creatures praise Him more mightily in humility than in exaltation, in need than in plenty, in fear than in joy, on the frontier of nothingness than when wholly oriented on

137 KD III/3, 334, CD 295. This section is called “The Misconception of Nothingness” (KD III/3, 334-342, CD 295-302).
138 KD III/3, 334-342, CD 295-302 passim.
139 KD III/3, 336, CD 296, 297. Cf. for a similar picture of the “shadowy side of creation;” KD III/1, 426, CD 372, 373.
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Therefore, we may call the bad things mentioned “dark,” or “shadowy.” But we must not regard them as being of themselves “involved in opposition and resistance to God’s creative will.” The opposition of the light and the dark side of creation is “relative and provisional.” Hence, the shadowy side of creation must not be identified with nothingness.

With the fundamental argument that we should not seek nothingness within God’s good creation Barth has in fact already fully disqualified this view. But he gives further reasons why this view is false. They concern the nature and status that nothingness acquires in this view. First of all, Barth argues, nothingness is regarded as something for which we can find a place, i.e., as being part of the creation. As a result, it becomes, to a certain extent, less dangerous: as part of the creation nothingness can never be taken as seriously as it should be. We consider it “as one element in the world among others” and thus we must “come to terms with it somehow.” We do so by placing it in a dialectical relationship to the “good” side of creation, which as a whole makes sense in the form of some higher unity. Then we “neither perceive nor evaluate it as true nothingness, but accept it, incorporate it into our worldview, validate and exculpate it, and thus, if we are consistent, finally justify it, not regarding and treating it as null, but as an essential and necessary part of existence.” Nothingness thus becomes something “innocuous, and even salutary.” It is not seen in its true form, i.e. as something abhorrent to God himself. The misconception of the nature and status of nothingness that follows from its confusion with the shadowy side thus leads to the wrong attitude to nothingness. Eventually, this attitude becomes one

140 KD III/3, 336, CD 297.
141 KD III/3, 335, CD 296.
142 KD III/3, 339, CD 299. In KD III/1 Barth seems to argue that the antithesis in creation does not have the final word, is not eternal. In Jesus Christ God fights and conquers what Barth calls here “the imperfection” of the creature. But in this imperfection “it shares in God’s perfection” (KD III/1, 441, CD 384, 385).
143 KD III/3, 339, CD 299.
144 KD III/3, 340, 341, 344, CD 299, 300, 303.
145 KD III/3, 344, CD 303, and KD III/3, 340, CD 300.
146 The term “dialectic” is also used for the relation between the light and shadowy side of creation in KD IV/1, 397, CD 360.
147 KD III/3, 339, CD 299. I used the term “worldview” as a translation of the German term Weltbild and not the term employed by the English translation: “philosophical outlook.”
148 KD III/3, 340, CD 300.
149 KD III/3, 344, CD 303.
of resignation and acceptation. If we act in this way it means that nothingness loses its true, dangerous character. Although we may feign seriousness in every possible way, nothingness is not taken seriously.\textsuperscript{150} In the end, this means that in views like these nothingness in fact triumphs.\textsuperscript{151} Because one does not take note of “true nothingness,” the latter is able, unnoticed, to bring ruin on creation.\textsuperscript{152} By coming to terms with that which is our most dangerous enemy we in fact serve it and give it power and honour.\textsuperscript{153} These criticisms of the view that confuses nothingness with the shadowy side of creation may very well be understood in terms of brokenness. Barth reproaches the adherents of this view for attempting to harmonise nothingness: they “hope to hear ultimate harmonies and to accomplish ultimate syntheses.”\textsuperscript{154} One could also say that they do not take into account the broken character of theological reflection on nothingness. They do not view nothingness as a truly disruptive breach in the relationship between Creator and creature, a breach that also affects our knowledge. In this way, these “unbroken” reflections in fact support nothingness.

This idea that nothingness becomes more dangerous if we do not notice its destructive power but turn it into something harmless may sound sensible at first. However, it is not entirely clear why this reproach applies to the view Barth mentions. It is difficult to determine this because the view itself is not clearly described.\textsuperscript{155} Barth depicts it very briefly and, what is more, in terms of his own theology. In his view the shadowy side is not dangerous because it is just as much a part of God’s perfect creation as the light side. The shadowy side is thus not something one should resist but accept. In his interpretation of the view that confuses nothingness with the shadowy side he pushes it entirely into this framework. Thus, he reproaches this view for accepting nothingness as a necessary

\textsuperscript{150} Barth speaks of “spasms of real seriousness” (KD III/3, 341, CD 300).
\textsuperscript{151} KD III/3, 339, CD 299.
\textsuperscript{152} At several points Barth distinguishes between true, real or genuine (\textit{wirklich}) nothingness and that which is wrongly regarded as nothingness (e.g. KD III/3, 339, 340 CD 299, 300).
\textsuperscript{153} KD III/3, 342, CD 301.
\textsuperscript{154} KD III/3, 341, CD 300. One should note that, as regards the shadowy and the light side of creation, Barth argues in favour of a harmonising view: both are part of the one harmony of God’s good creation. To illustrate this view, he refers to Mozart who has already heard the harmony of creation “which we shall not see until the end of time” (KD III/3, 337-339, CD 297-299).
\textsuperscript{155} For example, it is not clear which concrete theories Barth has in mind when attacking this confusion. Does he have in mind complete theological or philosophical theories or an ordinary, non-reflective identification of sickness and death with nothingness?
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part of creation. But perhaps this view wants nothing more than to point out a relation between nothingness and creation. Is it not possible to talk about nothingness’ power within creation without identifying it with the shadowy side in the sense of something necessary? Then the danger of harmonisation and resignation may not be that acute. Perhaps this view is only more explicit in pointing out the precise relation between nothingness and the shadowy side than Barth’s view. For the idea that there is such a relation is not foreign to Barth’s thinking itself. He argues that precisely in its shadowy side creation is near to nothingness. 156 This suggestion also arises from Barth’s distinction between sin and real sin, evil (Übel) and real evil, death and real death. 157 Real sin, evil and death are forms of nothingness. Barth defines “real” as “in opposition to the totality of God’s creation,” “the comprehensive negation of the creature and its nature.” 158 The point of this distinction seems to be the same as that of his argument against the confusion: it is not simply so that nothingness coincides with bad things. Still, there is a relation or analogy to those bad things, to the shadowy side of creation.

Moreover, nothingness and creation are related in a more general sense: it is in or through the creature that nothingness expresses itself and exercises its power. It is creation on which nothingness has a hold and not on God himself. Only in becoming a creature does God expose himself to nothingness. Thus, the idea that there is a relation between aspects of creation and nothingness does not seem to be totally unfounded. The problem seems to be how we are to distinguish between what endangers creation and the “ills which are inseparably bound up with creaturely existence in virtue of the shadowy side of creation.” 159

156 Barth often uses the German word Nachbar, “neighbour,” and related terms to indicate this proximity of the shadowy side of creation to nothingness: e.g. KD III/1, 440, 442, CD 383, 386; III/3, 84, 87, 335, 336, CD 74, 76, 296, 297.
157 E.g. KD III/3, 340, 353, CD 300, 310 (see p. 214, note 103 above). Cf. Barth’s distinction between “death as a natural limitation” and “eternal death, the enemy and annihilator of life” (KD III/3, 84, CD 74).
158 KD III/3, 353, CD 310.
159 KD III/3, 353, CD 310 (the English translation of “Schattenseite” by “negative side” does not seem correct). In the passage on the shadowy side of creation in KD III/1 this difference between nothingness and the shadowy side does not seem clear either (KD III/1, 427-476, CD 372-414). Here Barth seems to speak, for example, about God’s “No” to the imperfect aspects of creation, which means that the antithesis between good and bad is not eternal. At another point Barth clarifies that this “No” is not directed at creation as such but at nothingness that threatens creation (both arguments KD III/1, 442, CD 386). The difference between what is imperfect but still part of God’s perfect creation and what is imperfect in the sense of bound up with nothingness is not clarified by Barth.
It is in this act of distinction that the misconception Barth denounces seems to go wrong — which is not so surprising given the difficulty of this distinction. But where precisely it goes wrong is not clear. Is it not important for Barth’s argument to be as clear as possible about the problem of this distinction in order to prevent the feared confusion between nothingness and the shadowy side of creation? Another problem is the precise basis of this distinction in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. The idea of the goodness of creation seems to be the only ground for this distinction, but this basis is too narrow. It is not clear how the distinction between the shadowy side and nothingness follows from this. As a result, the distinction remains vague and imprecise, which also obscures the discussion of this confusion.

In the end, Barth traces misconceptions like the one that confuses nothingness with the shadowy side back to the assumption of the creature that “of itself and at its own discretion” it is able to discover the nature of nothingness.\textsuperscript{160} Again, the principal fault here is that this theological reflection starts “from below.” I already related this disqualification of thinking “from below” to the criterion of brokenness.\textsuperscript{161} Thinking “from below” forgets about the broken character of the knowledge of God: it forgets that it is a gift and erroneously thinks it can work this knowledge out by itself. Thinking “from above,” i.e. from God’s gift of revelation, thus implies a break with our usual ways of gaining knowledge. The discussion of this misconception related to the shadowy side shows that in the case of nothingness thinking “from above” means that we cannot arrive at a harmonious synthesis. We are left with a disruptive power that cannot be incorporated into our knowledge of the world. Insofar as it includes this aspect, Barth’s thinking about nothingness can be called broken.

Furthermore, by means of the discussion of this misconception, it also becomes clearer that this thinking “from below” is itself evil because it supports nothingness. Nothingness “triumphs” in reflections like these because it loses its aspect of danger. From this argument the question arises as to whether it is necessarily so that thinking “from below” goes wrong, that it supports nothingness. Is this, perhaps, what Barth means by the statement that theology is bound up with nothingness?\textsuperscript{162} Can theology’s brokenness, then, also mean that our knowledge is as such

\textsuperscript{160} KD III/3, 405 CD 351e.
\textsuperscript{161} See section 5.1 above.
\textsuperscript{162} See p. 205, note 47 above.
affected or corrupted by nothingness? The suggestion that this is so seems to follow from that which we found here, i.e. the triumph of nothingness in reflection “from below.” If this interpretation is correct, we may even regard the “blindness of our eyes” as a result of the power of nothingness: nothingness obstructs our view of the presence of the Kingdom of God. I will explore these interpretations further in the next section.

5.3.2. Nothingness and Human Sin

Although nothingness also assumes physical forms, its most important form is, in Barth’s view, that of sin. In a general formulation Barth defines sin as the human contradiction with God, neighbours, and therefore with themselves. Also with regard to this form of nothingness the danger of misconceptions is acute. One may for example erroneously regard it as a failing inherent to creation as such or as a possibility given with creaturely being. In Barth’s opinion, views like these do not deal with real sin. Sin must never be regarded as something inherent to creation or as a capacity of creaturely being. Although it is real, sin is an absurdity. In the form of sin, it becomes pre-eminently clear that nothingness is inexplicable. Sin cannot be fit into a system or theory. If one does systematise it, according to Barth, it is inevitable that it will be turned into something harmless.

From this short outline it is already clear that the subject of sin is another instance of the Barthian emphasis on the need for a broken reflection on nothingness in the sense we discovered above. Moreover, sin seems to be the best example of the fact that nothingness is a reality, that it is still present even though it has been defeated or forgiven. Therefore, the reflections on sin may throw light on the brokenness in the sense of the tension between the real and the defeated character of nothingness.

Perhaps we find in Barth’s treatment of the topic of sin more attention

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163 Cf. p. 213, note 99 above and, e.g., KD IV/1, 454 CD, 409.
164 E.g., KD IV/1, 397, CD 359, 360.
165 Barth also points out this inexplicability in the chapter on nothingness in KD III/3: nothingness is "the impossible and the intolerable. By reason of this character, whether in the form of sin, evil (Übel) or death, it is inexplicable as a natural process or condition. It is altogether inexplicable. The explicable is subject to a norm and occurs within a standard. But nothingness is absolutely without norm or standard…. For this reason it is inexplicable, and can be affirmed (festgestellt) only as that which is inherently inimical" (KD III/3, 408, CD 354).
166 See p. 220 above.
MISINTERPRETATIONS OF NOTHINGNESS

How does Barth approach the topic of sin? Also with respect to sin, Barth emphasises that we can know it only through the objective ground of knowledge, Jesus Christ. This means that the traditional structure of dogmatics, which puts the doctrine of sin at the beginning of its discussion of the doctrine of reconciliation, is, in Barth’s view, not correct. Barth thinks it is necessary to deal with the incarnation first, with God’s reconciliation with his creation in Jesus Christ, in order to be able, subsequently, to understand real sin. What then do incarnation and reconciliation disclose about the nature and status of sin precisely?

First, the fact of the incarnation as such throws light on the status of sin, as it did regarding the status of nothingness in general. It reveals how serious a problem sin is to God. Barth argues:

It was not necessary that God should become a human being and that the Son of God should die on the cross simply to deal with an interruption in the course of the world, simply to mitigate the relative imperfection of the human situation, or to strengthen and increase its relative perfection. Sin provokes God to direct action, to the act of the incarnation in which God himself is affected, concerned and offended by human sin. From this it is clear that sin is not just a small, harmless offence. In what, then, does this offence consist? It consists in the creature’s rejection of everything that is granted to him in Christ. It is the unbelief “in the God who was ‘in Christ reconciling the world to himself.’” It is also disobedience to God’s will, and ingratitude for the good which God grants his creature.

Still, Barth does not leave it at this broad indication of sin as unbelief, disobedience and ingratitude. In the fourth part of his Church Dogmatics, which

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167 In addition to the chapter on nothingness (KD III/3), I will also take into account for this section passages from the doctrine of sin in the fourth part of the Church Dogmatics.
168 KD IV/1, 397, CD 359; see also p. 213, note 99 above.
169 KD IV/1, 396, CD 359.
170 See also pp. 214, 215 above.
171 KD IV/1, 455, CD 411.
172 KD IV/1, 455, CD 411.
173 “It is true enough that the unbelief is the sin, the original form and source of all sins, and in the last analysis the only sin, because it is the sin which produces and embraces all other sins. In all sins it is unbelief which transgresses God’s command, which makes man lawless, which ignores and offends the divine majesty” (KD IV/1, 459, CD 414). Cf. also IV/2, 454, 455, CD 404, 405.
deals with the doctrine of reconciliation, Barth elaborates more concretely on what is revealed in Jesus Christ about sin than in the earlier chapter on nothingness. Of course, the reason for this is Barth’s conviction that the specific forms of sin can only be known in the light of the incarnation. Hence, in each of the volumes on reconciliation, he deals first with an aspect of the incarnation and subsequently discusses the corresponding sin.\footnote{These different forms of sin are not exhaustive in themselves. At the same time, however, they reveal sin “in its unity and totality” (KD IV/1, 459, CD 413).} Thus, the first aspect, which consists in the humiliation of God, his incarnation into a human being, corresponds to the human sin of pride (Hochmut). Whereas God “sets himself alongside the creature” in humility, the creature, in its pride, wants to be like God, wants to be his own lord, judge and helper.\footnote{KD IV/1, 142, CD 130.} The second Christological aspect, that of the exalted state of Jesus Christ, relates to what Barth calls the sin of sloth (Trägheit). By this, he means the sin of refusing to accept the renewal of the human being that is accomplished in Jesus Christ. Instead of accepting the outstretched hand of God, his grace, human beings reject it, thus also rejecting the opportunity to be themselves. This is the trivial form of sin, as opposed to the so-called heroic one of pride.\footnote{KD IV/2, 453, CD 403.} The third Christological aspect, finally, of Jesus Christ as the guarantor (Bürge) and true witness (wahrhaftige Zeuge) of the reconciliation of God with the human being, unites the preceding two aspects. It expresses the “how” of this reconciliation, while the other two express the “what.”\footnote{KD IV/3, 7, CD 8.} God’s reconciliation with the human being is not “closed in upon itself, but moves out and communicates itself” in Jesus Christ, the revelation of the reconciliation. The corresponding sin is that of falsehood (Lüge). Whereas the other two sins may be characterised as works, falsehood is the word of the sinful human being.\footnote{KD IV/3, 430, CD 373.} Falsehood is the word in which the divine revelation is patronised, interpreted, domesticated, acclimatised, accommodated, and corrected.\footnote{KD IV/3, 504, CD 437.} In all these sins human beings do that which is in direct opposition to what God reveals in his acting in Jesus Christ.

From this short summary of the three main forms of sin, it may already be clear that what is constitutive for Barth’s view of sin is the notion of contradiction (Widerspruch). Sin is the contradiction between God’s act of reconciliation with the human being on the one hand and the human
being’s refusal and denial of this grace on the other. Furthermore, Barth emphasises that this contradiction is an absurdity. In Jesus Christ the truth is established, the good accomplished and God’s will fulfilled. How, then, is it possible for a human being to go against the truth and the good, against God’s will? How is it possible for the human being not to want to live according to this, to deny it, transform it, fashion his own idea of the good and the truth? This is “the possibility … of the absolutely impossible.” It is an absurdity.

This means that sin must not be regarded as something for which human beings have a capacity. Nor can the sinful act of going counter to human destiny as determined by God ever succeed. That is why Barth first characterises all forms of sin as vain and futile (nichtig, vergeblich). The second characteristic, however, consists in the reality of sin: although it is vain and futile, it is real. However, Barth adds, in the third place, that this reality or factuality of sin is a reality in disguise. Sin does not show itself; it conceals its true nature to the human being. In the world around us sin always appears as something equivocal. This is another reason why Barth argues that real sin can be known only in God’s revelation: “The existence of Jesus Christ is the place where we have to do with human sin in its absolutely pure and developed and unequivocal form.” Outside this revelation we find sin only in its equivocal form, “with an admixture of the good,” on the basis of which it may be excused. Only in the light of God’s reconciling incarnation does sin appear as the absurdity or impossibility it truly is. Then it is also clear that it cannot be explained why or how human beings sin. Barth argues that “to try to find a reason for it is simply to show that we do not realise that we are talking of evil which is simply evil.” But does the reality of sin not imply that sin is at least a possibility? Barth argues that “we must not go beyond the negative statement, that since man is not God he can be tempted along these lines and therefore it was not, and is not, excluded that this event [i.e. sin] will take place.” Thus, Barth’s characterisation of sin as an absurd contradiction means that he does not want to find an

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180 E.g. KD IV/1, 454, 456, CD 410, 411; IV/2, 449, 450, 461, CD 400, 401, 410.
181 KD IV/1, 454, CD 410. Cf. also IV/2, 462, CD 411.
182 These three characteristics of futility or vanity, reality and disguise return in Barth’s discussion of all three sins of pride, sloth and falsehood.
184 KD IV/1, 439, CD 397.
185 KD IV/2, 468, CD 416.
186 KD IV/1, 454, CD 410.
explanation for the actuality of the human being who sins. Time and again he reiterates that sin cannot be explained or understood. In its inexplicability lies the gravity of sin as well. This inexplicability is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Barth contrasts his view of sin that is based on revelation with misconceptions that start “from below.” I already mentioned the false conception of sin as a capacity which rational human beings may actualise in freedom. Another misconception is that sin means the loss of one’s good nature. In the Bible one does not find that sin implies that the good nature with which human beings are created is changed for an evil one. On the other hand, from the fact that sin does not alter the good nature of the human being one should not infer that sin is only an incident. Sin must not be regarded merely as an “industrial accident” (Betriebsunfall) which does not affect the being of the individual. The problem with all these views is that they do not take sin seriously enough: it is not understood as the “crying contradiction” that it in fact is. The same is true of another exemplary misconception, based on an argument similar to that concerning the shadowy side of creation mentioned above. Sin may be confused with the dark side of creation. But Barth objects again that this darkness is only a “relative No,” only part of the “dialectic of human existence,” which has nothing to do with the human dwelling in sin. Another example of a view that starts “from below” is the one that takes human consciousness of their responsibility for sin as an awareness of “real sin.” However, this awareness can reveal sin only as “an element in our creatureliness,” because “what we know of ourselves is necessarily relative to our creatureliness.” The view of sin we create on the basis of this knowledge comes down to the recognition of the limitedness and imperfection of human being. But this imperfection is not sin. Moreover, this imperfection is often introduced as a mitigating circumstance or as a ground for self-pity. All this leads to excusing sin, so Barth argues. Taken together, the problem with these different misconceptions is that they do not take sin as seriously as they should. This is the result, in Barth’s view, of their striving for some higher
unity that includes sin. Again and again Barth warns against this danger of incorporating sin into a harmony, systematisation or synthesis. In these interpretations sin becomes something that in the end is necessary and, in that sense, good. Moreover, the human being no longer bears guilt for it because he cannot help it. For Barth’s notion of sin, it is “formally decisive” that it be recognised as a personal guilt that the human being can “never impute to others nor to an inexorable fate.” This is another aspect of the inexplicability of sin.

The harmonising views of sin that result from thinking “from below” turn sin into something that is necessary and thus no longer truly dangerous. Barth emphasises that sin cannot be explained in terms of a comprehensive system of which it is a necessary part. It is possible to know what sin is; the different forms of sin can be known through revelation. But God’s revelation cannot explain sin. In his reflections Barth wants to take this inexplicability or absurdity of sin into account. May this reflection then be characterised as “broken” in contrast with the systematic, harmonising or synthesising views mentioned above? This broken character would be in line with the meaning of brokenness as not corresponding to our usual standards and methods of knowledge. As regards the impossibility of explaining sin it seems that Barth is consistent in his attempt not to give explanations but to stick to the absurdity of sin. To that extent the qualification “broken” seems to apply.

Nevertheless, Barth’s analysis of sin is very systematic. For example, the three characteristics of futility, factuality and disguise return in his discussion of all the different forms of sin. Obviously, this kind of systematisation is not dangerous in Barth’s view. The kind of system Barth criticises is one in which sin becomes something necessary — be it as a necessary part of creation or as a theological necessity, e.g. as an indispensable condition for reconciliation. Reconciliation is God’s free act and sin is never a necessity but always the human “inaction” for which the human being is fully responsible. The absurdity of sin can never be fit into a system. But this does not mean “that we ought not to proceed here and everywhere with the greatest intellectual probity and with rigorous logic (guter Ordnung) and objectivity (strenger Sachlichkeit).” Barth’s

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194 E.g., IV/1, 453-455, CD 409-411; IV/2, 445-450, CD 397-400.
196 Barth makes this distinction between explaining (erklären) and knowing (erkennen) in KD IV/3, 204, CD 178.
197 See p. 229, note 182 above.
198 See also note 2 above (KD III/3, 333, CD 295).
objections to the systematising of sin are directed at a specific kind of system. Therefore, the systematic character of his approach does not mean that it does not display the brokenness as Barth defined it.

I already suggested above that, of all the forms of nothingness, sin may be the one in which the reality of nothingness appears most clearly: its reality seems undeniable. In comparison to what Barth says in the chapter on nothingness as to its reality in general, he is much more specific about the reality of sin in the fourth part of the *Church Dogmatics*. In his general discussion of nothingness in the third part Barth points out its reality as a power over against God: it is real insofar as God struggles with it and conquers it in Jesus Christ. However, this reality is based on a negative judgement: it results from God’s “No.” Moreover, Barth relates this reality to the blindness of our eyes that cannot yet see what is already known in Jesus Christ and what will be generally revealed at his Second Coming. In this way, the reality of nothingness in the end seems to melt away behind its negative, past and conquered character. In these general reflections on nothingness the emphasis is clearly on its defeated character. This emphasis may be seen, I suggested, as a correction of our usual overestimation of nothingness. Here, in the reflections on sin in the fourth part, however, this emphasis is much less prominent. The question here is also different: Barth argues against views that underestimate sin and thus excuse human beings for being the “servants of nothingness,” for “sharing its nature and producing and extending it.” Over against these views Barth emphasises the grave reality of nothingness as revealed in Christ. What is revealed in Jesus Christ is not just that sin is forgiven. Just as important, at least, is the revelation of the true character of sin and its specific forms, which are revealed precisely in the reconciliation through Christ. Barth discusses in great detail the different manifestations of nothingness in sin, which he does not give in the chapter on nothingness. There he seems hesitant to give examples of the reality of nothingness because it could detract from its defeatedness. Here the defeatedness is not that prominent; all attention is directed at the absurdity of sin. This absurdity may be summarised in the question of how sin can be real even though it goes against God’s work of grace and reconciliation. The emphasis on its absurdity means that the reality of sin is more prominent than in the chapter on nothingness. That this reality of

199 See p. 220, above.

200 KD III/3, 347, CD 306.
sin, just like that of nothingness, is revealed only in its defeat in Christ is here called a paradox.\textsuperscript{201}

What are the consequences of this stronger emphasis on the reality of nothingness for the question of the broken character of Barth’s reflections? On the basis of his reflections on the reality of nothingness in the third part I questioned whether Barth lives up to his promise of brokenness.\textsuperscript{202} He is too much focused on the conquered status of nothingness to give insight into the ways in which it is also still a reality for our “blinded eyes.” Do we find a truly broken view now that he has elaborated more fully on this reality in his reflections on sin? It is true that he pays much more equal attention to the reality and defeat of nothingness. It is much clearer how nothingness is still real even though it has been conquered. This view of nothingness thus seems to be justly called “broken.”

Moreover, it becomes much clearer in which sense this brokenness is a result of the break of nothingness. In the different chapters on the sins of pride, sloth and lying, Barth argues explicitly that sin also affects the human cognitive ability. What I already presumed above, i.e. that the most fundamental reason for Barth’s rejection of thinking “from below” is that our knowledge is affected or corrupted by nothingness, is affirmed here.\textsuperscript{203} Barth explicitly argues that “access to the knowledge that he is a sinner is lacking to man because he is a sinner.”\textsuperscript{204} Human knowing and understanding are fields where sin emerges pre-eminently. The pretension that we can know God and human beings, the good and the truth on our own is revealed in Jesus Christ as a central instance of sin, related to the sins of pride and of lying. Because the corruption of the human being is total, radical and universal, he is never able to think innocently.\textsuperscript{205} Therefore, he must be oriented entirely towards God’s revelation in order to know who God is and who humans are, to know what is good and true. This is the only source of true knowledge. And even then, even if the human being is entirely oriented to God’s revelation of himself, his reflections remain broken, in Barth’s view. The human being cannot put an end to the break of nothingness on his own. Only God can do this and will do this — but only at the end of time. The period until this moment

\textsuperscript{201} KD IV/2, 461, CD 410; KD IV/3, 203, CD 178.
\textsuperscript{202} See p. 220 above.
\textsuperscript{203} See pp. 225, 226 above.
\textsuperscript{204} KD IV/1, 398, CD 361. Barth presupposes agreement on this point because this idea is common to all “serious theology.” Cf. also IV/2, 424, CD 379, where Barth summarises his statements of the passage in KD IV/1.
\textsuperscript{205} KD IV/1, 538ff., CD 484ff.
of the “final, definitive and universal revelation” is the time of the “not yet.” This may be linked to the remarks on our blindness which prevents our seeing God’s kingdom. The suggestion that this blindness relates to the power of nothingness still seems correct. In this time of the “not yet” there is room for the resistance of nothingness: “It is always and everywhere present, as creaturely being is always and everywhere determined by it as well as by what the gracious God has already done on its behalf.” Until the moment that “we know as we are known” our knowledge is “piece-work” (Stückwerk). We cannot undo theology’s broken character. Theology is only possible as broken reflection.

Barth’s characterisation of theology as broken is not just a designation which should clarify the specific nature of his theological reflection. One may also read it as a warning against dangers related to theological reflection — dangers which he illustrates by the different misconceptions. The emphasis on theology’s broken character seems to be a warning against two dangers in particular. First, it warns against the danger of applying our human criteria for right and true knowledge to the knowledge of God. Secondly, it warns — as was confirmed in the reflections on sin — against the danger of thinking that human beings are able to comprehend the “unbroken truth” of God. We discovered both these dangers to be acute in what Barth indicated as misconceptions regarding sin. If human beings rely on their own consciousness of sin to know sin, they turn it into something harmless, which in fact means a collaboration with nothingness. Contra these approaches, Barth emphasises that reflection can only start from God’s revelation of himself. However — and this is the second danger — this does not mean that the problem of knowing sin or any other theological theme is fully solved. We cannot know God as he knows himself. Nothingness still stands between God and ourselves. Until the final revelation we will remain blind. Reflection on God’s revelation also remains broken, i.e. bound up with nothingness. Theologians should not forget this.

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206 KD IV/3, 212, CD 185.
207 KD IV/3, 212, CD 185.
208 The term piece-work, in German Stückwerk (KD III/3, 332, CD 294), seems to refer to 1 Corinthians 13: 9, 12 in Luther’s translation. “Denn unser Wissen ist Stückwerk, und unser Weissagen ist Stückwerk.” “Jetzt erkenne ich’s Stückweise; dann aber werde ich erkennen, gleichwie ich erkannt bin.”
209 “... here at last we must surely see and acknowledge that our knowledge is piece-work, and that only as such can it stand and make sense in relation to its theme” (KD III/3, 332, CD 294).
5.4. Barth’s Claim of Brokenness for his Reflection on Nothingness

Let me recapitulate the ways in which Barth’s discussions of misconceptions that approach nothingness “from below” further clarify his notion of brokenness. Barth may rightly claim brokenness for his thinking on nothingness as distinct from the “unbroken” views expressed in such misconceptions. First of all, this brokenness may be seen in his consistent attempt to start his reflections from what is revealed in Jesus Christ and not from our own experiences or intuitions. Thus, he discovers nothingness in its specific reality: as God’s enemy which God fights and conquers. This enemy is not found within God’s creation; Barth fundamentally criticises all views that bring it into creation. These views cannot take into account the real danger of nothingness. They turn it into something that is a necessary part of creation and thus harmless. Over against these harmonising views, Barth’s account may be called broken. He argues that in these misconceptions nothingness triumphs. If we do not start our reflections on nothingness from God’s revelation they fall under the spell of nothingness. For our knowing is affected by nothingness. This is the ultimate root of the broken character of theological reflection. However, the reason why we turned to these discussions of the misconceptions was that brokenness seems to be lacking in Barth’s reflections on nothingness in general in part three of the *Church Dogmatics*. The focus on the conquered status of nothingness there seems to decrease the brokenness. In this section I will return to this problem in order to arrive at a final evaluation of the broken character of Barth’s view of evil.

There is one aspect of Barth’s view of nothingness in particular which seems to be out of harmony with the broken character he claims for his reflection. It is the interpretation of the reality of nothingness as resulting from God’s “No.” The idea of God’s acting as always including election and rejection and especially the subsequent characterisation of nothingness as God’s *opus alienum* sound very much like an explanation. But in relation to sin Barth warned against the danger of trying to explain nothingness. Moreover, Barth does not present the fact that nothingness lives from God’s “No” as an absurdity — which is another characteristic of sin. Rather, nothingness here seems to become more like a necessity that is implied in all God’s acting. That conclusion reminds us precisely of the views for which Barth blames the misconceptions. All this seems to contradict the principles of reflection indicated by the term brokenness.

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210 See pp. 208-211 above.
Why then does Barth present this theory of the \textit{opus alienum}? Although Barth does not explain it in this way, the idea that nothingness gets its reality from its rejection by God seems to be related to two pressing questions. First, what is the origin of nothingness? And second, is God responsible for nothingness? The first question arises if one takes into account that nothingness must be a real power because God engages in a struggle with it in Jesus Christ. From where does it derive its reality? The answer cannot simply be that God gives it this character. God did not create nothingness. Then God would be responsible for nothingness, which is incompatible with the idea that nothingness is that which God does not will. But the solution that nothingness is a separate power is not possible either. A dualism of two equal powers, one good and one bad, is in conflict with the doctrine of God’s omnipotence, or, in Barth’s words, with the principle that God is “Lord over all.”\textsuperscript{211} Hence, nothingness must be within God’s control also as regards its coming into existence, but without God being its cause. The idea that nothingness lives from God’s “No” explains this. Moreover, it also explains how nothingness is still a reality even though it has been conquered. As God’s \textit{opus alienum} nothingness will exist until the time God fulfils his \textit{opus proprium}. The idea that nothingness lives from God’s “No” may thus be regarded as Barth’s solution to the question of the origin and existence of nothingness as a real power as well as God’s relation to it. In this way nothingness can be represented as both real and conquered.

But is this idea of nothingness as living from God’s “No” founded on the “objective ground of knowledge”? Much seems to depend on Barth’s interpretation of the story of creation as presented in the first chapter of Genesis.\textsuperscript{212} This interpretation forms the basis of Barth’s idea of God’s distinction between chaos and creation; insofar the source of this idea is clear. But the theory of the existence of nothingness in rejection and the ideas of \textit{opus proprium} and \textit{alienum} certainly go further than this interpretation of the creation story. It builds a theory. Why does Barth not leave it at the statement that nothingness is that to which God is opposed, which he rejects and defeats? His attempt to clarify nothingness as that which lives from God’s “No” seems to be an example of what he argues is not possible in a broken reflection on nothingness: i.e. “a complete

\textsuperscript{211} However, Barth acknowledges that nothingness bears certain similarities to God, in that it “is on the frontier of the creature... and yet itself not a creature” (KD III/3, 87, CD 76). Still, it is clear that for Barth nothingness cannot be a “second and negative God” (KD III/3, 380, CD 332). Cf. also KD III/3, 405, 407, CD 351, 353; IV/1, 453, CD 409.

\textsuperscript{212} See pp. 207, 208 above.
and compact sequence of thoughts and statements yielded by a principle.”

Perhaps Barth would object that he does not argue on the basis of a principle but on the basis of a person: Jesus Christ. Yet, he does not make clear how precisely it is shown in Jesus Christ that nothingness is the opus alienum of God in the sense of the inevitable side effect of God’s grace. Moreover, this theory of the opus alienum reminds us of a way of thinking Barth rejects as “philosophical:” he seems to make an attempt to “speak the final word” as regards nothingness. In Barth’s reflections on the works (opus) of God, one may perceive a kind of synthesis that overarches God’s “Yes” and his “No.” This does not mean that his theory of God’s opus is a fully consistent theory. Neither are Barth’s systematic aspirations very explicit in the sense that he openly poses systematic questions, e.g. of the origin of nothingness or something similar. Still, such questions seem to be implicit in his thinking on the reality of nothingness.

One may wonder whether Barth rightly claims brokenness for this part of his doctrine. Would it not have been more appropriate for a broken view to acknowledge the inexplicability of the reality of nothingness and to leave it at the statement that “it is what God does not will” but we do not know why it exists? Or would it not have been better to mention the hidden systematic considerations explicitly, even if this would have resulted in posing more systematic questions without being able to answer them? By claiming to derive all theological knowledge from revelation without disclosing his references in detail, Barth sometimes puts up a smoke screen which hinders a proper understanding of his reflections.


214 Cf. KD IV/3, 199, 200, CD 174, 175.

215 “Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie,” Gesamtausgabe Vol. III, op. cit., 383. Barth argues here that the striving for syntheses is characteristic for philosophy. In Barth’s view, theology should not conform to the philosophical striving for a coordinating and reconciliating principle in which any dualism is neutralised and the final word is spoken. Theology should refrain from reaching for the one that is beyond all oppositions. For these oppositions are only removed in God. Theology starts from this conviction, while philosophy aims at it and thinks it possible to create it by itself (384).

216 Cf. Härle’s remarks on inconsistencies in this respect (see p. 217, note 125 above).

217 Cf. Krötke (Sünde und Nichtiges bei Karl Barth, op. cit., 108) who argues that the question “Where does evil come from?” is not Barth’s question.

218 Barth acknowledges this formulation as the basic knowledge regarding evil: “It is not speculation, but a description which even the veriest child can understand, simply to say of evil in the first instance that it is what God does not will” (KD IV/3, 202, CD 177).
Moreover, it gives rise to doubts regarding the revelation-based character of all his ideas and to conjectures about other, perhaps more purely systematic, interests that underlie his reflections.

Doubts with respect to the broken character of Barth’s thinking do not only arise on the basis of the systematic, explanatory appearance of the idea of nothingness as living from God’s “No.” I also mentioned that this leads to an emphasis on the reality of nothingness as resulting from God’s rejection, so that it does not become clear in which sense we also experience this reality. 219 I concluded that this emphasis makes Barth’s reflections less broken because one does not gain insight into how nothingness is still real in the time of the “not yet.” However, especially in his reflections on sin we have seen that this reality becomes much clearer. Here nothingness was depicted as an absurdity that cannot be explained but is very much real. Nevertheless, this clarification in the parts dealing with sin does not mean that the reproach of lack of brokenness finally does not hold. That the reality of the power that resists God’s world dominion has a purely negative basis and that it is conquered are very important aspects of Barth’s reflection.

This fundamental importance clearly appears in the term Barth chooses for this power: nothingness, das Nichtige. It is clear that under the heading of this term Barth goes into topics that are usually indicated by the term “evil.” 220 Barth often explicitly places the two terms “nothingness” and “evil” next to each other, as synonyms. 221 But also the references to the problem of theodicy, to suffering and sin make clear that Barth is dealing here with the classical theme of evil. Yet, it is of course not without significance that Barth prefers the term “nothingness” to that of “evil.” What does the use of the term “nothingness” mean for Barth’s view of what is usually called evil? Does his notion of nothingness imply a specific focus with regard to phenomena that may be called evil?

As we have seen, nothingness includes both physical and moral forms. 222 But even this statement that nothingness comprises both physical and moral evil is not correct. It suggests that nothingness comprises,

219 See p. 220 above.
220 This is also clear from the fact that Barth engages in the section on the knowledge of nothingness of this chapter in a critical evaluation of views of other thinkers that clearly deal with evil. Here he refers, for example, to Leibniz’ notion of evil as nothingness (KD III/3, 364, CD 319).
221 “The character of nothingness derives from its ontic peculiarity. It is evil (das Böse)” (KD III/3, 407 CD 353). Cf. also e.g. KD III/3, 380 CD 331, 332; KD IV/3, 199-205, CD 174-180.
222 See p. 214 above.
among other things, what we usually regard as physical evil, e.g. earthquakes, sickness, death. But for Barth nothingness is precisely not “what we usually regard as evil.” The term nothingness is the first, basic step in Barth’s attempt to break with our usual way of thinking about evil. He chooses an unusual, artificial term in order to start his reflections on what is usually called evil with a clean slate. Thus, he tries to build his reflections entirely on God’s revelation and avoid these usual ways of reflecting on evil.

Subsequently, Barth defines nothingness as that which opposes “God’s world-dominion.” He precludes any suggestion of a connection between nothingness and either God or creation. Still, this opposition is not nothing in the sense that it does not exist. Nor may nothingness be equated with “what is not,” i.e. what is not God and not the creature. Nothingness “is” in “a third way of its own.” The way in which it exists, then, is clear from the term itself: it is nichtig, i.e. it is a futile power, without any real power. This futility must then be understood in the light of God’s eternal rejection of nothingness and the concrete defeat of nothingness in Christ. Nothingness cannot undo the work of God’s grace. Its power is limited by the boundaries of God’s “No.”

Thus, the tenor of the term nothingness is completely in line with Barth’s emphasis on its rejected and conquered status. It affirms that this emphasis is fundamental for Barth’s view. And it affirms that brokenness is not characteristic of all Barth’s dealing with nothingness. The term nothingness itself does not seem to be a completely broken term. It does force a break with our usual thinking, but it is not broken in the sense that it expresses both the reality and the conqueredness of evil in an equal way. This is telling for Barth’s view of evil in general.

Just as in the views of evil in Ricœur, Kant and Jaspers, we find in Barth’s approach a strong awareness of the dangers implied in reflecting on evil. All four authors emphasise the danger of not taking evil seriously, of turning evil into something harmless through reflection on it. Still, Barth’s reasons for highlighting this problem are different from those of the others. For Barth, the real danger of evil consists in that it is a power opposed to God, with which God himself struggles and, especially, which God conquers. In this defeat the gravity of evil appears: it is a power

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223 See p. 206, note 55 above.
224 KD III/3, 402, 403, CD 349.
225 KD III/3, 403, CD 349.
226 KD III/3, 402, CD 349.
which threatens creation as such, a power with which only God can struggle and which he conquers. Nothingness is not a human opponent. This combination of the gravity of its reality and the certainty of its defeat is remarkable. It seems specific to Barth’s view. In the next chapter I will explore whether this suggestion is correct.

From Barth’s view of evil we now have a clear impression of what a religious view can look like. By relating his view to the approaches of the other authors I will further explore the proper character of a religious approach in comparison to more philosophical approaches. Subsequently, this will throw light on our general question of the religious nature of the notion of evil. In order to be able to investigate this question, however, it was necessary to analyse Barth according to his own terms first.
With this final chapter we come face to face with the key questions of this investigation. Here an answer must be formulated to the question that guided our general project of regauging the notion of evil: In what context is speaking of evil at home? Our hypothesis was that speaking of evil is most at home in a religious context. This would mean that the meaning and value of the notion of evil can be best understood against its religious background. To test this hypothesis, I first investigated the meanings of evil that are found in symbols and myths of evil. The reason for starting here was that Ricœur’s hermeneutical analysis of these symbols and myths seemed to provide a way out of the impasse that surrounds reflection on evil. Reflection on evil is problematic. This problem may be described briefly as the question of whether reflection is able to express the intense nature of the experiences under consideration and to do justice to them. Ricœur recognised the danger of striving for an all too systematic and unequivocal reflection that cannot take the absurd and ambiguous nature of experiences of evil into account. The symbols and myths provided us with a middle stage between experiences and fully theological or philosophical reflections. The symbols and myths Ricœur chose turned out to be religious themselves in nature: to a greater or lesser extent they are expressions of the confession of evil before God. This choice of religious symbols and myths to approach the notion of evil confirmed my initial hypothesis. However, their religious nature was not the subject of separate investigation in Ricœur’s writings. Therefore, a comparison of these expressions with speaking of evil in contexts in which religion is not prominent was required. I chose two contexts: an ethical and a tragic view of evil. The ethical and tragic perspectives had been discovered to be important for the theme of evil in the analysis of the symbols and myths. Subsequently, I investigated whether the theme
of evil is approached in these views in a different way than in a religious view. More precisely, the leading question could be formulated as: Does the broad notion of evil we found in Ricœur’s analysis also appear in these contexts? Does evil acquire a different meaning here? Are there certain aspects of evil in the religious approach that are lacking in these views? And if so, is it possible to say that speaking of evil is less at home in these views? With these questions in mind we first turned to Kant and subsequently to Jaspers.

In the ethical context of Kant’s reflections on evil we discovered, among other things, that there is hardly any room for the inevitability of evil. Although Kant wants to take this aspect into account, he can only incorporate it at the price of great tension in his argument. It is remarkable that this tension does not appear until his investigation into religion. In Jaspers’ tragic view of evil, on the other hand, we observed, among other things, that evil becomes part of the human condition and even seems to merge into it. The question arose of whether evil is a distinct category at all in this tragic view. Moreover, evil is not seen as something that should not be there. These observations reminded us of Ricœur’s conclusion that the tragic perspective corrects the ethical view; it follows the ethical view. It is doubtful, however, whether an ethical perspective can follow a tragic view. The analysis of speaking of evil in ethical and tragic contexts thus confirmed that a broad notion of evil as discovered in Ricœur’s analysis of symbols and myths of evil can be distinguished from narrow or one-sided ones. This broad notion is also complex: it comprises different perspectives that cannot be expressed in each other’s terms. This complex, ambiguous nature is difficult to take into account in reflection on evil; symbolic language expresses this ambiguity more naturally.

Although the investigation into ethical and tragic views of evil on the basis of the findings in Ricœur’s analysis yielded a great deal for our question of the context in which speaking of evil is at home, it also seemed necessary to deal with a wholly religious view. Ricœur’s analysis of symbolic language of evil did deal with religious contexts, but this religious character was not a separate subject of study. Moreover, not all symbols and myths were religious in the same sense or to the same extent. Therefore, it was important to study a wholly religious view that makes this religious character explicit and reflects on it.

As an example of such a view, I dealt with Barth’s approach to evil in the form of nothingness. So that this investigation would not be influenced by our previous suggestions and findings and lead us to conclude
already at the beginning of Chapter 2 (p. 20, note 3), I promised that I would deal with this aspect of the end of evil in the final chapter. See also Chapter 2, note 265.

too easily that our hypothesis was confirmed, Barth’s view was first approached without relating it to the other views. Moreover, it seemed difficult to relate his emphatically theological approach to the other philosophical ones. The analysis of Barth’s view revealed first of all an emphasis on the problematic character of the notion of evil. Is that which we classify as evil truly evil? Are we able to fathom this evil if we are also bound up with it? Barth emphasises that on the basis of our natural human intuitions evil is easily misconceived. Thus, Barth highlights a problem that runs through our entire investigation: that of the dangers related to reflection on evil. He argues that only by means of God’s gift of knowledge revealed in Christ are we able to know real evil, which also affects us. In Christ evil is revealed as first of all God’s enemy with which God struggles and which God conquers. The view of evil as something that is conquered by God contrasts with our human representations of it. Thus, this view has a strong critical impetus as regards knowing evil.

In this final chapter we must investigate whether these characteristics are typical of a religious view. To determine this, we must compare it with the ethical and tragic views of Kant and Jaspers. This will be the last step in our examination of the hypothesis that evil is most at home in a religious context.

For this examination I will bring the different authors into dialogue with one another. First, I will leave Barth’s reflection aside and make a detour via Ricoeur’s notion of the end of evil. A link to this notion is obvious because Ricoeur points out that it is crucial for a religious approach to view evil from the perspective of its end, of its defeat. Moreover, by means of this detour it may be possible to open up Barth’s emphatically theological reflections towards a comparison with other, philosophical approaches. First I will investigate what Ricoeur means by this crucial role of the perspective of the end of evil. Subsequently, I will compare Ricoeur’s view with Barth’s. In that way I also hope to gain further insight into the problem that in Barth’s reflections the reality of evil threatens to disappear behind its status as conquered. After this we will examine whether this perspective of the end of evil reveals aspects of the notion of evil that are not found in the ethical and tragic views of Kant and Jaspers respectively. With this we will arrive at our final reflections on the question of whether evil is a typically religious category.

The choice to conclude this chapter with a discussion of a theme that is related to the area investigated so far, yet new, is deliberate. I do not

1 Already at the beginning of Chapter 2 (p. 20, note 3), I promised that I would deal with this aspect of the end of evil in the final chapter. See also Chapter 2, note 265.
see the value of concluding this study with a recapitulation of the detailed investigations of the foregoing chapters in short, seemingly firm conclusions. First, these conclusions or findings can be found in the different chapters themselves and are embedded in a line of thinking from which they cannot easily be dissociated as isolated truths. Moreover, I think the nature of the theme of evil is such that it does not lend itself to short, straightforward conclusions. In my view, such a treatment of evil easily results in trivial statements. We can better understand the meaning and value of the notion of evil by investigating the reflection in which it figures. In this chapter I will analyse this reflection by means of a direct comparison between the four authors. Because of the new theme of the end of evil, it will again be necessary to elaborate the different perspectives in detail. This asks a great deal from the reader because, again, a considerable amount of new information is presented. However, this elaboration will contribute to answering our main questions.

6.1. The End of Evil in Symbols and Myths

According to Ricœur, the symbols and myths of evil cannot be understood without taking into account the symbolism of the end of evil. This symbolism includes ideas varying from purification, forgiveness and penance to eschatological images of the arrival of an era without suffering or wrongdoing. Thus, it is impossible to understand the symbol of sin without the notion of redemption or justification or to speak of defilement without mentioning purification. In later texts in which Ricœur reflects more abstractly on the concrete symbols and myths he relates the idea of the end of evil to notions like hope and promise. What light do these contrasting notions throw on evil? Why is this perspective of the end of evil crucial for understanding the meaning of the notion of evil? In order to determine this, it seems helpful to examine Ricœur’s analysis quite extensively, for also as regards this perspective an approach via the symbols seems accurate. The symbolic mode may be called the obvious mode.

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2 Ricœur mentions the intrinsic relation between evil and divine deliverance from evil already in *Freedom and Nature*: “in one aspect, the integral experience of the fault is the fault experienced as before God, that is, as sin. This is why we cannot dissociate the fault and Transcendence. But above all Transcendence is what liberates freedom from the fault. Thus human beings live Transcendence, as purification and deliverance of their freedom as salvation” (VI 31, FN 29; see also Chapter 2, p. 42, note 116).

3 E.g. SdM 229, SE 71.
of expressing the perspective of the end of evil. Direct language does not seem appropriate, because the end of evil is mainly something imagined and not yet realised — it is something for which one hopes or in which one believes. This hope and belief is expressed in symbolic language. Within this language it is again clarifying to distinguish between symbols and myths. I will not first give a separate impression of the end of evil in the symbols and myths but will incorporate this into the answers to the questions I just mentioned. I will conclude this section by relating these answers to Ricœur’s reflections in some later articles.

6.1.1. Great Contrasts in the Symbols of the End of Evil

What do the symbols reveal as regards the end of evil? First of all, they reveal that evil does not have permanent influence or definitive power: its days are numbered. There is a good order that triumphs over the presence of evil. This may be expressed in symbols concerned with a partial end of specific evil here and now — as in pardon — but also by eschatological images of a final end of all evil. Ricœur notices that this idea of an end of evil is present in one of the most fundamental mechanisms in experiencing evil, i.e. the interpretation of suffering as punishment for a known or unknown transgression.4 This interpretation is animated not only by a passive fear of suffering but by an active “demand for a just punishment.”5 Behind this demand lies the conviction that this punishment serves a purpose, namely the restoration of the order. The negation or ending of evil through the punishment should take away the defilement and is thus an act of expiation.6 The expectation of a restoration of the order implicit in the demand for just punishment may finally animate an eschatological spirit of hope for a final end of evil, i.e. the abolition of fear. This is the ultimate expression of the idea that order is more original and stronger than evil. The idea that evil is limited by an order that is more fundamental is basically already present in the symbolism of defilement. This idea is further expanded in the other symbols.

The limitation of evil under the influence of representations of its end also entails a delimitation of evil: it is a definite category that comprises

4 Ricœur shows that this interpretation of suffering, which “takes up the whole physical order into the ethical order,” is already present in the most physical symbolism, i.e. that of defilement (SdM 192, SE 31). The dread of vengeance on the impure person is never “merely physical” but “already ethical” (SdM 191, SE 30).
5 Ricœur argues this with respect to the symbol of defilement (SdM 203, SE 42).
6 SdM 204, SE 44.
specific phenomena. For, in order to be able to demand a just punishment, there must be an awareness of what the evil is. There must be a sense of the degree or gravity of the evil committed and of the relation between transgression and punishment. With respect to this delimitation of evil Ricœur gives several examples of the composition of a detailed system of laws, which should cover the different aspects of evil and indicate the corresponding punishment. These laws exist in all three symbolic fields. An important difference, however, seems to lie in the degree to which the human being is able, on his own, to know these laws and thus his transgression, i.e. by introspection and examination of his conscience. In other words, there is a difference in the degree to which evil becomes a human affair. Especially with respect to the symbolism of sin, Ricœur points out that there are two poles that play a role in the accomplishment of the end of evil, i.e. the divine and the human pole. The human being confesses his sins before God. God represents the absolute measure that goes beyond the human one. God is the only one who has complete insight into the order and a precise knowledge of evil. A good illustration of this two-pole nature seems to be the tension between “the infinite measure of the demand that God addresses to human beings” and the finite commandments. This tension characterises the prophetic literature of Israel. One may also think, in this respect, of the “forgotten sins” or “sins that are committed unwittingly” but that are nevertheless imputed to the human being and for which he thus also repents.

In the symbolism of guilt, however, this absolute measure which goes beyond the human measure tends to dissolve because the “I that accuses itself” is overemphasised: the “modality of man the measure” is born. This turn to the human side is never fully established in the religious literature Ricœur studies. But a tendency towards it can be observed in the Greek “penal experience” and in the Pharisaic “scrupulous conscience.” The latter is characterised by “an ethics of detail.” Here a life that, in all its facets, meets the demand of the law is no longer an ideal limit but something that can be realised in present human life. The law does not demand anything that human beings cannot do. This gives rise to the idea that sin is not irreparable; it is always possible for a human being

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7 SdM 215, SE 55, 56; cf. also Chapter 2, pp. 54, 55.
8 SdM 239, SE 82.
10 SdM 259, SE 104.
11 SdM 276, SE 123.
12 SdM 281, SE 129.
to return from his evil ways. Thus, the end of evil becomes something over which the human being has control; evil is then “a permanent temptation that gives opportunity for the exercise of freedom of choice, an obstacle to be transformed into a springboard.”  

However, one may wonder whether the limitation of evil in such an “ethics of detail” still entails a delimitation of evil as a distinct category. Does it still make sense to speak of evil in a general sense here? Does the general notion of evil not fragment into an enormous amount of specific evil deeds that can be measured so that the corresponding punishment, i.e. specific suffering, can be meted out in proportion to the evil committed? This question may be clarified by relating it to Ricœur’s remark that in this view — expressed in the symbols of guilt — there is no sense of a radical character of evil. Here one does not find a “radical evil, engendered by the human being, from which he is radically powerless to free himself.”  

In this view — expressed in the symbolism of sin — only God is able to put an end to evil. Thus, both the radically sinful human state and the perspective of divine deliverance from this sin come to light before God. This is “the great contrast between radical evil and radical deliverance” that is pre-eminently shown in the thinking of Paul, Augustine and Luther. Ricœur’s view, contrasts like these are indispensable for expressing the “ultimate meaning of fault.” He even argues that “whatever weakens those contrasts dissipates the meaning” of fault. Ricœur does not elaborate on this conclusion. Why precisely is it, one wonders, that contrasts like that of radical evil and radical deliverance are constitutive for the meaning of evil?

14 SdM 283, SE 131.
15 Ricœur refers to the prophet Amos as an example of this view in which “the unlimited character of the demand reveals how deeply rooted human evil is” (SdM 216, SE 56).
16 SdM 283, SE 131; cf. also SdM 290, SE 139, where Ricœur also brackets the three together.
17 Ricœur writes with reference to Paul: “It is, then, impossible to reflect philosophically on fault while omitting the fact, embarrassing for reflection, that the ultimate meaning of fault could be manifested only by means of the great contrasts set up by the first passionate thinker of Christianity: justification by the practice of the law and justification by faith; boasting and believing: works and grace. Whatever weakens those contrasts dissipates the meaning [i.e. of fault].” Although Ricœur does not mention the “great contrast” between radical evil and radical deliverance explicitly in this passage, these remarks (SdM 283, SE 131) clearly apply to this Pauline contrast as well.
I would suggest the answer may be found along the following lines. This contrast seems to express the idea that human beings are unable to have complete control over evil or complete knowledge of it. Human beings cannot fully measure or determine the extent or depth of moral evil and do not have full insight into the “distribution” of suffering. From this it follows that evil is always characterised by a certain obscurity and intangibility. In the symbols just mentioned this intangibility and obscurity is revealed as being intrinsically related to a religious context: the position of the human being “before God.”18 Before God human existence is revealed as marked by sin, as radically evil; evil thus transcends human consciousness of it.19 Before God evil is also revealed as something whose end is not accomplished by human beings but by God; this is Ricoeur’s “radical deliverance.” However, if the end of evil and the delimitation of evil that follows from it become a wholly human affair — so that one cannot speak genuinely of a sense of “before God” — we do not find these great contrasts. Then the broad, comprehensive notion of evil no longer seems to function as a distinct category.

From these remarks on the important role of the divine in relation to the accomplishment of the end of evil one should not conclude that human beings do not play any part in it. The end of evil is not just presented as God’s concern; the human being also has an influence on it. For example, Ricoeur indicates how, at the level of the symbolism of sin, the end of evil is represented by a double symbol, that of “pardon-return.”20 The symbol of pardon refers to God’s initiative, while that of return pertains to human actions. The symbol of return reflects the idea that human beings abandon their bad ways and also of a restoration of their relation with God. In this way the prophets — in the biblical literature — summon the people to return; in this sense the return depends on them. However, the return is at the same time something for which God is implored as if it depended entirely on God.21 Thus, in a paradoxical way the importance of both the divine and the human initiatives is stated.22 The human influence on God’s pardon is also ambiguous. On the one hand,

18 This category of “before God” (*devant Dieu*) is the primary characteristic of the symbolism of sin (SdM 210, SE 50; cf. Chapter 2, pp. 42, 53, note 116, 178).
19 E.g. SdM 239, 240, SE 82, 83.
20 SdM 235-238, SE 78-81.
21 SdM 237, SE 80.
22 “The paradox is that the inexorable is modified by an appeal to right choice, but choice does not, in its turn, annex either the Wrath of God or his pardon to the arbitrament of human beings” (SdM 227, SE 69).
the human beings are urged to make a choice for life instead of death, a choice that matters. On the other hand, God’s pardon or wrath does never correspond entirely to the human choice. Moreover, the notion of pardon as such puts the whole scheme of evil followed by wrath or punishment under tension: pardon is the “forgetting or the renouncing of the wrath” of God. Another view of the relation between God’s initiative and the human one is found in the symbolism of “buying back.” Here the initiative to put an end to evil is on the divine side. But evil is not seen as something for which human beings are fully responsible. Rather, the image in which evil is represented is that of a power that holds human beings captive and from which they cannot deliver themselves. One may say that the “great contrasts” we find in these symbols of the end of evil — pardon, return and buying back — concern the role and influence of the divine and the human in the end of evil. It is again clear that this end is never accomplished by human beings alone. But at the same time their acting is of crucial importance. This paradox is again an indication of the obscurity of evil. That this obscurity does not mean that we can view evil as a less than urgent problem requiring crucial choices becomes clear in these symbols of the end of evil. These symbols flourish in the symbolism of sin, in which the absolute, divine perspective stands besides the human view.

Yet one may wonder whether this obscure and complex nature of evil only becomes clear in the light of its end. Does this reveal something new about the symbols of evil? Is this not already clear from the ambiguity of ethical and tragic views? The tragic view of evil indicates a correction of a purely ethical view by contrasting the idea that evil is wholly an issue of freedom and responsibility with the inevitability of evil. This also results in the awareness that evil is not something over which one can have complete control. Thus, one may ask whether it is the religious context of the “before God” which reveals this fundamental connotation of evil. Can it not be shown just as well in other contexts? The difference in the kind of obscurity and complexity in these contexts is as obvious as it is important. While the tragic view emphasises the inevitability of evil, the perspective of the end of evil — which cannot be imagined without the divine — reveals that evil is not definitive. In the end there will not be evil; order will overcome disorder. It is important to see that this

23 SdM 226, 227, SE 68, 69.
24 SdM 235, SE 78.
25 SdM 247-250, SE 91-93.
idea that evil will come to end is not absent from an ethical consciousness. In an ethical view evil can be paid for and thus put to an end by an appropriate punishment. In a religious view, however, we find the anticipation of or hope for an end to evil that exceeds it, that is greater than evil.

A good illustration of this difference is another great contrast that the apostle Paul indicates, i.e. that between justification by faith and justification through the works of the law. In the argument relating to this contrast, Paul shows how overemphasising the ethical view of evil eventually leads to the dissolution of the possibility of an end to evil and thus to a conscience that is “shut in.” The idea that the demand of the law can be met in human life corresponds to an extremely detailed ethics. And “from this multiplication of the commandments there comes an indictment that is itself indefinite.” Under the weight of this infinite indictment the feeling of guilt also becomes massive: the human being despair of being saved. This evil of the good will is discovered, Ricœur emphasises, only by “looking back from justification by faith.” Justification by faith corresponds to an end of evil accomplished by God and not on the basis of the ethical value of human action. Moreover, this justice is not just a future event but already present here and now for the human being who believes. In this perspective of the end of evil, the radical character of evil revealed in the “before God” is preserved: its radicality can be seen precisely because it is put to an end by God. This is a hopeful perspective on evil. This notion of hope will become clearer by looking at the role of the end of evil in myths. In this context of myths we will also see clearer that, under the influence of the discrepancy between the end and the present existence of evil, evil constitutes a distinct category. These aspects of the notion of evil do not yet seem to follow from the tension between the ethical and the tragic views as such but are revealed in the light of the notion of the end of evil.

26 SdM 296, 297, SE 145, 146.
27 SdM 295, SE 144.
28 SdM 297, SE 147.
29 SdM 298, SE 148.
30 In relation to the symbols of evil, Ricœur remarks that in the guilty conscience — where the divine measure tends to disappear — there is no longer any limit and thus also no accuser. This means that “the verdict is hardened into fate” (SdM 295, SE 144). This implies, one may add, that there is no longer a distinct category of evil. Thus, we find again a relation between the perspective of the end of evil and the presence of a distinct category of evil.
6.1.2. The Coherence between the Beginning and the End of Evil in the Myths

Ricœur’s investigation of the symbols of the end of evil reveals a line running from purification, to mercy, and, finally, to justification.\textsuperscript{31} This line is continued, in Ricœur’s view, in the Adamic myth.\textsuperscript{32} This continuation is not just a recapitulation of the foregoing symbols. Also as regards the aspect of the end of evil, it is clarifying to remember that the myths differ from the symbols in that they narrate a history of evil. The myths Ricœur analyses narrate the beginning and end of evil.\textsuperscript{33} The Adamic myth gives “an elucidation of the system of images concerning the end of time” which was not yet present in the symbols.\textsuperscript{34} In the other, non-anthropological, myths of evil Ricœur points out an equivalent moment of deliverance from evil.\textsuperscript{35}

However, it will become clear that there are many differences between the end of evil as presented in the Adamic myth and in the three non-anthropological myths. At first glance already one observes that the notion of this end is not very important or strong in these non-anthropological myths. In the myth of the drama of creation, for example, the end of evil coincides with the creation of the world. Thus, the evil in this world is not so much seen as something from which it is necessary to be delivered. Still, the evil in the present world is related to this primordial drama by a cultic re-enactment of the original drama in the rite.\textsuperscript{36} But there is “no history of salvation distinct from the drama of creation.”\textsuperscript{37} As regards the tragic myth, Ricœur points out that there is no possibility of a deliverance from evil outside the tragic. The deliverance within the tragic takes the form of a pity, “an impotent emotion of participation in the misfortunes of the hero, a sort of weeping with him and purifying the tears by the beauty of song.”\textsuperscript{38} But this deliverance does not point to a definitive end of evil. It is rather through insight into the inevitability of evil that one

\textsuperscript{31} SdM 400, SE 261.
\textsuperscript{32} The designation “Adamic myth” should be taken here in a very broad sense as referring to the myth of Adam and Eve and the biblical images associated with it. I will deal with this further below. Cf. also Chapter 2, note 278.
\textsuperscript{33} See Chapter 2, note 265 and note 65 below.
\textsuperscript{34} SdM 400, SE 261.
\textsuperscript{35} This equivalence is stated explicitly: SdM 400, 403, SE 260, 264. Cf. also Chapter 2.3 on the myths of evil.
\textsuperscript{36} SdM 337, SE 191.
\textsuperscript{37} SdM 337, SE 191.
\textsuperscript{38} SdM 213, SE 227.
is, in a certain sense, delivered from the experience of its seemingly contingent occurrence. Insight also plays a role in the myth of the exiled soul, although not so much in the aesthetic sense of the tragic spectacle. Here salvation is closely related to an insight into the divine character of the soul, which distinguishes it from the body. Thus, evil is connected to a specific part of being, i.e. the bodily, from which it is possible to free oneself in a ritual or purely cognitive act. The idea of a definitive end of evil does not seem to be present here either. The question we should investigate below is whether the differences between the representations of the end of evil related to the Adamic myth and to the non-anthropological myths can be further clarified by taking into account the specifically religious character of this “Adamic field.”

First of all, it is important to notice that the Adamic myth — in the strict sense of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis — does not contain an “end of evil.” The story recounts only the beginning of evil. Ricœur, however, regards this “symbol of the beginning” as part of a larger movement that also includes the end of evil. According to him, the biblical writer of this story uses the “symbol of the beginning” as a retrospective symbol, “closely bound up with a whole historical experience turned towards the future.” Moreover, according to Ricœur, the symbol of the beginning of evil in Adam and Eve may be related to and seen in line with symbols of the end of evil from other biblical narratives. He calls these latter symbols eschatological symbols. Ricœur’s question is how this relation between eschatological symbols and symbols of the beginning of evil must be understood. Are the former symbols homogeneous with the latter? He eventually concludes that they are homogeneous or coherent. Just as the moments of deliverance in the non-anthropological myths form a coherent whole with the specific types of myths, the eschatological symbols cohere with the Adamic myth. What precisely does Ricœur mean by this idea of coherence? This question is related directly to that of the importance of the notion of an end of evil for understanding evil as such. Ricœur does not, however, point out this coherence in detail.

39 SdM 399, SE 260.
40 SdM 399, SE 260.
41 Ricœur borrows the definition of eschatology formulated by J. Héring: “the ensemble of thoughts that express religious hopes concerning the coming of a world regarded as ideal, that world being habitually presented as one which must be preceded by a ‘Judgement’ (which implies the destruction of the present world or of the powers that dominate it)” (SdM 403, SE 263, 264, note 17).
42 SdM 399, 400, 403, SE 260, 264.
43 SdM 403, SE 264.
To understand his remarks on this point it is therefore necessary to follow his depiction of the series of eschatological symbols that ensue from the representation of the beginning of evil in the Adamic myth. The coherence can be noted in the course of his depiction of this series.

Ricoeur states beforehand that the two most important eschatological symbols that complete the Adamic symbolism are that of the “Son of Man” and the “second Adam.” Yet he recognises that these are quite late expressions that do not belong to the same cultural milieu as the Adamic myth. In order to understand them, the intermediate symbols must be analysed first. The line of symbols that continues through to these late symbols starts with the figure of Abraham or, more precisely, with the promise made by God to Abraham that he will make of him a great nation in a new land. This promise puts the present under tension. History is conceived of as moving towards the fulfilment of this promise. This view of history supports, according to Ricoeur, “a whole series of transpositions which, step by step, could lead to the eschatological figures and images.” The tension that the promise imposes on the present increases when the fulfilment of the promise is postponed. Then the promise starts to refer to an eschatological future that never fully coincides with any historical occurrence, such as the conquest of the promised land of Canaan. In the figure of the king a similar movement of eschatologisation is observed. The view of the ideal king changes from a backwards-looking one, emphasising the founding of this kingship “in those times,” to a future-oriented one that regards the ideal king as one that still has to come.

A quite different figure of hope is that of the “Servant of the Lord.” This is a figure who brings salvation through his suffering and not through his great royal power. According to Ricoeur, an essential element of pardon is expressed in this figure, i.e. “expiation through the voluntary suffering of another.” By entering into a relationship with and accepting

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44 It is remarkable that Ricoeur states beforehand that these symbols “answer, term for term, to the Adamic symbol.” These symbols “permit us to discover at a single stroke the mutual agreement between the symbols of the fall that happened at the Beginning and the symbols of the salvation that will come at the End of time” (SdM 400, SE 261). Apparently, he has an intuition of this correspondence that urges him to state this already before the analysis of the whole series of eschatological symbols itself.
45 SdM 401-403, SE 262-264.
46 SdM 402, SE 263.
47 SdM 403-404, SE 264-265.
49 SdM 405, SE 267.
the suffering state of this Servant, pardon is possible through what may be called the gift of his suffering for the remission of sins. The most eschatologically depicted figure, however, is that of the Son of Man, of whom it is believed that he will come at the end of time as the eternal king and the judge of the world.\textsuperscript{50} As the “Man of the end” this figure is, in Ricœur’s view, a replica of the first human being.\textsuperscript{51} A complete fusion of these two figures of the Servant of the Lord and the Son of Man is observed in the account given of Jesus in the Gospels.\textsuperscript{52} The pardon conferred by Jesus is at the same time already present in this world, like that of the Servant of the Lord, and part of the cosmic judgement at the end of time as in the case of the Son of Man. In this final judgement Jesus is not only judge and witness but also intercessor. The latter function relates to the Servant of the Lord’s role as victim. The identification of the Servant of the Lord and the Son of Man also brings about an identification of the Son of Man with suffering fellow humans, “the least of my brethren.”\textsuperscript{53} From this eschatological symbol it is only one step to the symbol which is, in Ricœur’s view, entirely symmetrical with that of the myth of the beginning of evil: i.e. the symbol of the “second Adam.”\textsuperscript{54}

Ricœur argues that the Pauline symbol of the “second Adam” may be understood in the light of the entire series of figures from Abraham to Jesus. For example, it presupposes the fusion of the Servant of the Lord and the Son of Man. But it also enables a retrospective understanding of the entire series. For the symbol of the second Adam entails a view of the whole movement from the first to the second Adam.\textsuperscript{55} This movement is regarded as one of “progression.” Thus, the second Adam is not just inversely proportional to the first, in the sense that the first brought evil and the second grants deliverance from evil. The deliverance of the second Adam relates to the first sin as a “how much more.”\textsuperscript{56} This term “how much more” is taken from the letter of Paul to the Romans and indicates that the grace of God is not simply equal to the fault of the human beings but surpasses it.\textsuperscript{57} It establishes a new creation. This idea of

\textsuperscript{50} SdM 406-407, SE 267-269.
\textsuperscript{51} SdM 406, SE 268.
\textsuperscript{52} SdM 407-409, SE 269-271.
\textsuperscript{53} SdM 408, 409, SE 270.
\textsuperscript{54} SdM 409, SE 271.
\textsuperscript{55} SdM 409, 410, SE 271, 272.
\textsuperscript{56} SdM 410, SE 272.
\textsuperscript{57} Ricœur quotes Romans 5:15: “But not as the fault so also the gift. For if by the fault of one many died, \textit{how much more} the grace of God and the gift conferred by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, have abounded unto many” (SdM 410, SE 272). According to
a “how much more” figures largely in Ricœur’s reflections on the notion of the end of evil.58 Here he explains it as related to a kind of pedagogic view of history which shows that God rights what went wrong.59 With this pedagogic view we arrive at the end of the series of eschatological symbols.60 According to Ricœur, “we must go this far in order to understand that the bible never speaks of sin except in the perspective of the salvation that delivers from sin.”61 It is necessary to follow the entire series of symbols in order to understand what pardon means.62

What may be concluded from this whole series of eschatological symbols as regards their internal coherence and their homogeneity with the idea of a beginning of evil? Very simply formulated, this coherence may be said to consist in that evil has an end because it has a beginning. The first and the second Adam are images that express the same view of evil. In this view evil is not regarded as eternal, inevitable, already present before the creation of the world etc. It comes into existence within creation and here it will come to an end. The time between the beginning and the end is regarded as meaningful history. The struggle with evil that takes place in that history is regarded from the perspective of its end — which also entails images of its beginning.

Ricœur, it is “properly Paulinian that, by a miraculous initiative on the part of God, the fall is turned into growth and progress; the curse of paradise lost becomes a test and medicine” (SdM 412, SE 273, 274).

58 I deal with other examples below, see pp. 260, 261.

59 Ricœur also expresses this view in other terms: “that vision of history according to which the human beings’ access to their humanity, their passage from infancy to maturity, both on the individual level and on the level of the species, proceed through awareness of his limitations, his conflicts, and his sufferings” (SdM 412, SE 274).

60 After this interpretation of the figure of the second Adam, Ricœur looks at two other symbols to which this symbolism of the second Adam gives rise, i.e. “the “juridical” symbolism of acquittal and the “mystical” symbolism of the living graft” (SdM 413, SE 275, 276). With these symbols the series of eschatological figures is truly complete. Yet Ricœur also distinguishes these two final symbols from the others when he asks “whether and how a philosophy and a psychology of ‘pardon’ are possible on the basis of this rich symbolism” (SdM416, SE 278). Apparently, these symbols cannot as easily as the others be the subject of a hermeneutical interpretation. It seems that the reason for this has to do with their being embedded in a more pronounced eschatological view of the Judgment. In this symbolism deliverance from evil gains a cosmic, communal and temporal dimension, which raises the symbolism of pardon above a too individualistic or subjective meaning (SdM 414, 415, SE 276, 277).

61 SdM 412, SE 274.

62 In Ricœur’s view, there is no direct psychological access to this phenomenon of pardon. (SdM 412, 413, SE 274, 275.) The experience of pardon only takes shape in an active participation of the individual in the symbolism. This experience can only be signified symbolically, and cannot be something purely subjective or something wholly objectively perceptible (SdM 413, SE 275).
The specific character of this view of evil becomes clearer if we see the fundamental differences with the other, non-anthropological myths. In these myths evil is already there: there is no specific moment at which evil comes into existence. For the drama of creation evil is something entirely past; it is not a problem of this world but a category that applies to what precedes creation. It is viewed as somehow already present in the “time” before creation; subsequently, it is conquered in the moment of creation itself. In the tragic myth evil — which results from the interaction between human beings and gods — is inevitably part of life; the end of evil is not imagined in a radical sense. For the myth of the exiled soul evil is inevitably given with the bodily nature of the creation. This does not mean that the end of evil is wholly absent from these myths. But, just as the beginning is not radical, so the end is not radical or total either. Thus, there is no promise of a final end of evil that imposes a tension on the present. Again, one may wonder whether in these contexts speaking of evil is at home. It seems that evil is not so much a distinct category in these myths: it merges into ideas like primordial chaos, fate or the bodily, all of which indicate inevitability. The coherence between the beginning and the end of evil as found in the Adamic myth thus seems to be an important, perhaps even constitutive aspect of speaking of evil.

How precisely does the religious character of the Adamic myth relate to this aspect of the coherence between the beginning and the end of evil? We already pointed out before that the spirit behind the Adamic myth is one of “repentance.” This spirit seems to be clarifying also as regards the issue of coherence. Repentance or confession signifies the situation of the human being “before God.” The human being confesses his sins to God; he invokes God and shows repentance for him. This dimension of “before God” is already present in the symbols, especially in the symbols of sin and guilt. It presupposes a personal relationship between God and the human being. The confession is based on a belief in the innocence and holiness of God as regards evil. The reverse of this belief is the conviction that evil can be imputed only to human beings. God is not the origin of evil. Still, this confession is not just concerned with the origin of evil. Rather, it starts from a hope for the end of evil. God is not just invoked to confess; he is invoked because he may grant forgiveness. God does not remain unmoved by the sins of human beings. In the context of the personal relationship with his creatures, God reacts to them with wrath but also with mercy. Thus, by means of the confession, human

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sin is incorporated into a dialectic of divine judgement or condemnation and mercy. The experience of this dialectic is already formed by the symbols of sin and guilt. What the myth adds to this experience is a historical dimension: an origin of evil in primordial times and an end of evil in the future. Ricœur indicates the transition from symbol to myth as follows: “The same dialectic of judgement and mercy, beginning from an interpretation of the *actual* history of the prophetic epoch is projected into a mythical representation of the ‘beginning’ and the ‘end.’” What gives this universal history “its tension and its temporal impulsion” is that the end of evil does not simply involve a return to some original state before the entrance of evil into the good world. The deliverance from evil is of the kind of “how much more.” To state it in Pauline terms, the second Adam is greater than the first. The time between the beginning and the end thus becomes a meaningful time, with a development. This meaning is shaped by the cohering notions of beginning and end of evil, of the first and the second Adam.

6.1.3. Evil, Religion and Hope

Ricœur’s analysis of the importance of the idea of an end of evil for understanding the notion of evil as such has now been investigated. What he does not analyse in *The Symbolism of Evil* is the question of how typical this idea is for a religious context. Still, as we have seen, the divine plays a crucial role in this idea of and end of evil. Let me clarify

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64 SdM 382, SE 241.
65 SdM 382, 383, SE 241, 242 (Italics are mine). The formulation of the difference between the level of symbols and that of myths in terms of a “projection into a mythical representation” must not be understood in the sense that this mythical “projection” is derivative or an extra representation that could easily be left out. Ricœur is convinced that “pardon, as something experienced, gets its meaning from the participation of the individual in the ‘type’ of the fundamental Man,” i.e. in the myths of the beginning and the end of evil, of Adam and the second Adam (SdM 412, SE 274). “Without that reference to the symbol of the Man, the experience is shut up in that which is most inward and most individual” (id.). Thus, both evil and deliverance become universal in the myth: in Adam we have all sinned, in the second Adam pardon is announced for everyone who participates in him. This is, again, an example of the coherence between the symbol of the beginning and that of the end.
66 SdM 410, SE 272.
67 SdM 412, SE 274.
68 In an article on the symbols of evil published after *The Symbolism of Evil* Ricœur speaks of a “meaningful history” (histoire sensée) (“The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I” Cdl 310, CoI 313).
further this relation between the idea of the end of evil and the religious context and link these reflections to some later articles by Rieceur.

Both in relation to the symbols and the myths we saw that the idea of an end of evil seems constitutive for the notion of evil as such. In the non-anthropological myths one does not find an end of evil in a radical sense as in the case of the Adamic myth. And precisely in these myths one wonders whether there is any distinct category of evil. What could have been a distinct notion of evil seems to merge into other categories. In relation to the symbolism of guilt one observes that the more the end of evil becomes a purely human affair laid down in an ethico-juridical system, the less a general, broad notion of evil seems meaningful. There remain only specific evil acts that must be distinguished from one another and related to their specific expiations. If, however, the religious dimension remains important, the end of evil does not become an entirely human affair but also something that is in God’s hands. A general, broad notion of evil seems more at home in this view. This evil comes to light in the perspective of its end. Because there is deliverance and pardon — now already and definitively at the end of time — the evil of the present moment is revealed as “scandalous.” In this perspective human beings are revealed as sinful; in this perspective speaking of evil arises. The hopeful expectation of the end of evil puts the present under tension. It incites us to protest and to make choices against evil.

But — and that is the second conclusion — this end is never something human beings alone bring about. They cannot completely control it or force it from the divine. Moreover, for human beings there is much indistinctness and obscurity with respect to the when and how of this end. God will put an end to evil. The divine will regarding this end is not completely erratic but also not entirely predictable. Furthermore, the character of the divine accomplishment of this end is itself unpredictable. It may occur in different ways: through a judgement that adds a just punishment to committed evil and through pardon, mercy and forgiveness that acquits

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69 I take the term “scandalous” from a remark Rieceur makes in the context of his examination of the difference between the myth of the drama of creation and the Adamic myth. Here he argues that “evil becomes scandalous at the same time as it becomes historical” (SdM 348, SE 203). In the myth of the drama of creation evil is not something historical but identical with a “prior and resurgent chaos” that precedes creation and history. If, however, creation is good, as it is in the Adamic myth, historical drama and conflict can no longer be related to some primordial chaos. The drama is now history itself and what causes this drama is evil. Thus, “evil becomes scandalous at the same time as it becomes historical.”
guilt. The indispensability of the divine role in the accomplishment of the end of evil means that this end is never a purely human juridical issue. Forgiveness for what seems unforgivable by human standards is possible, as well as punishment for what does not count as evil from a human perspective.

As a result, evil is not something with which we can fully come to grips. There is something elusive about it, which is related to the role of the divine. Ricœur’s definition of evil as a crisis of the bond between human beings and what they consider sacred becomes clearer now that this idea of the end of evil has become analysed. This crisis can never be resolved by an initiative from the human side alone. For, precisely because it is a crisis in the bond with the sacred, the human being is not fully aware of this crisis by himself. The human being does not know evil in the way God knows it. He is never sure that he has not committed a transgression. He is sinful even if he does not know it. Thus the dimension of the sacred, which is pre-eminently revealed in the notion of the end of evil, is related to a certain elusiveness in the notion of evil. Because evil is not only an interpersonal category but involves a crisis in relation to the sacred, it is not precise or tangible. It cannot be caught in precise rules and prescriptions. The field to which the expression “evil” refers is much more complex than that. Of course, this must not be taken in the sense that it is in principle impossible to know evil. On the contrary, I already stated above that it is precisely in the perspective of the end of evil that evil becomes a burning question, a distinct problem — but a problem that we cannot fathom entirely.

The relation between the end of evil, the sacred and evil itself may be linked with analyses Ricœur gives in some later articles. Here he
explicitly investigates this relation — which he did not do in *The Symbolism of Evil*. He considers the image of the end of evil as specifically characteristic of a religious view of evil. This end of evil is an image that belongs to the language of hope. The language about evil religion uses “keeps itself entirely within the limits of the perimeter of the promise and under the sign of hope.” This means that, in Ricœur’s view, the end of evil is not just a religious notion, as I argued above, but that it expresses the central distinguishing characteristic of a religious view of evil, the perspective of hope. In line with expressions used above in relation to the myths we may call this religious view of evil a retrospective view, i.e. a view that sees evil retrospectively from its end. Moreover, this perspective is crucial for religion as such: it is the most important defining characteristic according to Ricœur.

This view of the relation between religion, hope and evil may be clarified by two expressions by which he marks this hope, i.e. the category of “in spite of” and that of “how much more,” which complement each other. He bases these categories on biblical images. The category of “in spite of” expresses that this is a hope in spite of death; it is a hope for the resurrection from the dead in spite of the prevalence of death. It is hope for the end of evil in spite of the fact that evil is now very real. This expression may be related to the first conclusion I drew above. Hope puts the present situation under tension; this tension is what is expressed in the “in spite of.” And this “in spite of” precisely indicates that in this
perspective evil becomes a pressing issue, a distinct problem. This “in spite of” thus indicates the revealing function of the end of evil as regards evil. The Pauline category of “how much more,” on the other hand, is an expression that is part of a specific logic, i.e. the “logic of superabundance.” This logic is radically different from the logic of “crime and punishment,” which is an ethical logic of equivalence, instead of superabundance. The logic of superabundance is absurd. That is the logic of hope. It is the idea of an end of evil that is not equivalent to its beginning. This idea may be related to my second conclusion above: i.e. that we cannot fully come to grips with evil. It expresses the special character of the confession of evil before God in which both the dimensions of evil and its end cannot be spelled out in detail because they go beyond human comprehension.

With the help of Ricœur’s analysis of the symbols and myths we have now traced a tension that seems characteristic of evil in a religious context. On the one hand evil becomes a specific category precisely in this context. Evil is confessed before God. It comes to light in the perspective of the end of evil that God accomplishes. On the other hand, evil is an elusive category precisely because of this divine interference. It is something that we cannot fully grasp or control.

It is remarkable to see how this tension seems to counterbalance the dangers of, and objections to reflecting on evil that we have come across in this study. These dangers may be classified into two groups: on the one hand, the dangers related to the vagueness of the notion of evil and, on the other, the dangers of the absolute, strong, condemning character of the notion. As regards the first group, I referred in the first chapter to the problem that the notion of evil is vague and wide-ranging. People object that it would be better if it were dismantled into different specific problems that can be solved. In that way one may avoid apathy in relation to the problems of this world. Over against these objections, one may point out how the notion of evil arises as a definite, distinct category precisely in a religious context. For this distinct character of evil the perspective of the end of evil seems to be very important. The phenomena indicated by this category are scandalous, so apathy does not seem to be a natural reaction. Here, the notion of evil does not mean that one should not do something against it.

78 E.g. “Freedom in the Light of Hope” CdI 401, Col 410; “Guilt, Ethics and Religion” CdI 428, Col 437, 438; “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 206, 207. Ricœur also uses the term “economy of superabundance.”
The second group of dangers constitutes an even greater problem. Throughout our study it has been formulated in a variety of different arguments. It is argued, for example, that, because of its absolute character, the notion of evil leads to condemning others and justifying oneself. Ricœur emphasised the danger of not taking into account the ambiguity and absurdity of evil. Kant points out the danger of excusing oneself by passing responsibility to some natural inclination to evil. Jaspers emphasises the danger of knowing precisely what evil consists in, of claiming complete knowledge. Over against these dangers one may point out that in a religious context evil is something that cannot be completely known or controlled by human beings. There seems to be a critical moment inherent to the notion of evil because human beings lack complete insight into it. Only God knows evil and is able to put an end to it.

Of course, these counterarguments also show that the dangers and objections mentioned do bear on something. That evil is a separate category means that there is a danger of its becoming an all too clear-cut notion, of implying that one can know “how it all fits together.” And that evil is at the same time something that cannot be grasped completely may cause a vagueness that conceals its real nature. Therefore, we must find out whether in a religious context this notion has enough critical weight to counterbalance these dangers. This speaking of a critical dimension of the notion of evil reminds us immediately of Barth’s view of evil in which the problem of knowing evil is central. In order to investigate further whether we have found a specific characteristic of a religious view of evil in this tension we will therefore turn to Barth.

6.2. Religion and a Critical Elaboration of the End of Evil

Ricœur’s claim that religion views evil retrospectively from its end may easily be recognised in Barth’s view of evil. The idea that sin can only be known in the light of pardon applies entirely to Barth’s view of sin. He argues that nothingness can be known only in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ: here it is shown as God’s enemy that God fights and conquers. In Jesus Christ the end of evil is revealed. Still, in comparison to Ricœur, Barth has an emphatically critical understanding of this retrospective view of evil. Barth opposes the view of evil from the perspective of its end to our natural, human way of seeing evil. Two aspects are very important for this opposition. First, the retrospective view reveals
evil as a limited threat. Evil is always subject to God’s Lordship. Moreover, in Christ God breaks its power. Thus it is a power without a heart: das Nichtige. By ourselves, however, we are not inclined to see evil in this way. Rather, we regard it as something inherent to the world, as inevitable and not as something past. We view it, for example, as a necessary part of the creation. Secondly, the retrospective view contrasts with our natural views in that evil is revealed as an absurd reality. This reality is most clear in its concrete form of sin. The end of sin, or the forgiveness of sin that is accomplished in Christ, is a manifestation of God’s love for his creature. Only in the light of this love of God does it become clear that the creature does not respond to this love. And this is precisely what sin is: the rejection of the gift of grace, the rejection of God’s relationship with the creature, his forgiveness, his mercy. However, this rejection must not be presented as just as much a possibility as the acceptance of this grace. On the contrary, this rejection is an impossibility. It runs counter to our destiny, the destiny of this creation. As such, it is an absurdity. We, however, are inclined to view sin as only a “deficiency of our spontaneity and activity,” i.e. as an “attribute or defect of the creature.”

We do not see it in its gravity, as an impossible offence against God who offers us his love. These two oppositions are the most important contrasts between the knowledge of evil revealed in Jesus Christ and our natural knowledge of evil.

How does Barth ground this critical view of our human ability to know evil? Ultimately, this view goes back to the conviction that human beings are bound up with evil. Evil also affects their thinking. The creature cannot estimate, assess, evaluate or classify sin by itself, “since the creature itself permits and participates in it, bearing and committing the offence against God.” Only in the light of the revelation in Jesus Christ is real sin revealed, i.e. “the alien and adversary to whom I myself have given place.” It is precisely because we sin that we cannot know sin. If we imagine evil or sin, we easily represent it in a way in which we are not responsible for it. We excuse ourselves and try to justify ourselves. Or we represent it as not that harmful; we do not take it seriously. However, this

79 See Chapter 5.3.1. above, especially pp. 222, 223, on Barth’s reflections on the misconception that identifies evil with the shadowy side of creation.
81 KD III/3, 349, CD 307.
82 KD III/3, 349, CD 307.
83 E.g. KD IV/1, 398, CD 360, 361: “Access to the knowledge that they are sinners is lacking to human beings because they are sinners.”
sinful knowing is not the only possible human reflection on evil. According to Barth, God’s revelation may grant us knowledge of true evil. It is thus possible to know evil in its true appearance. Yet, this knowledge remains broken: in the present time human beings remain bound up with evil also in their reflection on God’s gift of knowledge. We can know God only in the shadow of the break that is caused by this presence of evil. All theological knowledge is broken knowledge. In this way Barth’s idea of a broken reflection and the underlying distrust of our natural human intuitions concerning evil are grounded in an anthropology that emphasises human susceptibility to evil.

As we have seen in the foregoing chapter, it is difficult to understand the extent to which this brokenness determines our knowledge of true evil according to Barth. Sometimes he speaks of evil in a way that does not seem to display much brokenness. This is especially so when he emphasises that evil has been conquered, that its power is past. As I have pointed out, the reality which evil still is in the present world tends to disappear behind this view of evil as conquered. A broken view of evil should take into account both its reality and its defeat and should display the tension between them. It is clarifying to interpret this problem in terms of the categories of “in spite of” and “how much more” that are central to Ricoeur’s analysis of the notion of the end of evil. Barth seems to focus on the “how much more” at the expense of the “in spite of.” The notion of “in spite of” can be easily related to Barth’s idea of a broken knowledge of evil. It expresses that we hope for an end of evil in spite of the fact that evil is also still very much real. This “in spite of” also indicates that the reality of evil becomes clear precisely in the light of the end of evil. Because we know of this end we speak of an “in spite of.” The category of “how much more” subsequently expresses that the relation between the reality of evil and the end of evil indicated in the “in spite of” is not one to one. The logic of hope is not a logic of equivalence but of super-abundance. Grace, forgiveness, the end of evil — they all surpass our comprehension. Thus, Barth emphasises, for example, that in God’s opus proprium, his work of grace, evil will finally come to an end: when the opus proprium is fulfilled the opus alienum will terminate. He also argues that God’s love and forgiveness are more than equal to human sin. However, Ricoeur emphasises that the “how much more” cannot do

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85 See Chapter 5, pp. 235-239.
86 “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” PsS 206.
without the “in spite of:” “it gives to hope its lucidity, its seriousness, its determination.” But Barth seems to focus one-sidedly on the pole of the “how much more.” Against this background of an emphasised “how much more” the “in spite of” does not emerge very clearly. It is not clear in which sense the end of evil has not yet been accomplished. The tension between the representation of the end of evil and the present reality of evil does not become manifest. It is not clear in which sense it is still real. This, of course, gives rise to objections that evil is a vague category and, moreover, something about which human beings can do nothing. Ultimately, this one-sidedness can be traced back to an emphasis on the knowledge of evil as revealed in Christ over against our natural representations of evil.

In Ricœur’s reflections one does not find this strong emphasis on the correction that the retrospective view of evil implies in comparison to our common knowledge. Nonetheless, an impetus to a similar kind of view may be seen in the second of the conclusions I drew above on the basis of Ricœur’s analysis. I argued that when evil is seen in the light of its end it is something that human beings cannot completely understand or with which they cannot fully come to grips. This is largely due to the role the divine plays in the realisation of the end of evil. Evil is thus represented as something larger than and different from what humans may think it to be. However, the conclusion of this lack of complete insight into evil is something different from arguing that human beings are themselves responsible of this lack, that this lack is their sin, the result of their reflecting on evil on the basis of their own intuitions. We saw above that in the symbols and myths the representation of the end of evil is embedded in the confession of evil before God and is motivated by a spirit of repentance. But this confession and repentance did not include the human knowledge of evil itself. Barth argues, on the other hand, that the human susceptibility to evil, their sinful nature, also affects their reflecting on evil. Thus his distrust of our natural human conceptions of evil and his awareness of the dangers accompanying them seem to be more fundamental than in the case of Ricœur. For Ricœur, the danger of reflection on evil consists primarily in not doing justice to its absurdity and ambiguity. Reflection tends to represent evil in a less complex way. In Barth’s view, this tendency is revealed to be a tendency to excuse oneself — something that characterises human reflection on evil as such. The term “tendency” may be misleading, for what is meant is that human beings are fully

87 “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 207.
responsible for this thinking: it is their sin and not something which follows inevitably from their finiteness. In this respect Barth and Ricœur are of the same mind. What Barth adds in comparison to Ricœur is a fundamental distrust of human thinking about evil. He reveals the sinful human inclination to turn evil into something harmless, to absolve oneself from complicity in it, to justify oneself in reflection on evil.

Barth’s view deepens the retrospective view of evil by highlighting the problem of knowing evil. He points out that the human sin of representing evil in a harmless way is revealed in the light of God’s victory over evil. Just above I equated this sin with that of justifying oneself, of self-justification. In an article discussing the difference between ethical and religious views of guilt Ricœur argues that precisely in the context of religion the sin of self-justification, of “one’s own justice” is revealed. He states that “situated before God, evil is qualitatively changed [sc. in comparison with a moral view]: it consists less in a transgression of a law than in a pretension of human beings to be master of their life.” He also relates this disclosure of the evil of self-justification to the perspective of the end of evil. This would mean that with his critical elaboration of the retrospective view Barth reveals an aspect that is essential to a religious view of evil — which would be an important conclusion for our investigation into this religious view. However, in order to illustrate his argument Ricœur refers in this article to Kant’s philosophy. In the chapter on Kant I concluded that his view of evil is “mainly ethical” and lacks certain aspects that are fundamental in the religious confession. May Kant’s view nevertheless be able — as Ricœur argues — to reveal the sin of self-justification, which was suggested to be specific to religion? If this is true, it would imply either that Kant in fact holds a religious view of evil himself or that what was suggested to be specifically religious can also be phrased in a secular, mainly ethical view. It is clear that these reflections are directly related to our general search for the possible specific character of a religious speaking of evil. Therefore, I will proceed with my argument — which departs from Ricœur’s view and is deepened by Barth’s view — by taking into account Ricœur’s interpretation of Kant.

6.3. Hope in Religion and Ethics

In the article I just mentioned Ricœur compares religious and ethical ways of dealing with guilt. In this comparison he concludes that the ethical

88 “Guilt, Ethics and Religion” Cdl 428, Col 438.
conscience is not aware of “the most deadly of all expressions of evil,” of “the true evil,” of “the evil of evil.” The ethical conscience defines evil essentially as a transgression of the law. To understand this transgression it uses primarily the notion of freedom. However, this notion does not explain how it is possible that “freedom is enslaved”, that it is “unavailable to itself.” At this point ethical conscience reaches its limit: it has to acknowledge that it cannot understand this disposition of freedom.

At first sight, this depiction of the ethical conscience reminds us immediately of Kant’s view of evil, for he regards evil as the transgression of the moral law. By this transgression freedom indeed enslaves itself; the will no longer acts freely in accordance with the moral law. And, finally, the origin of this enslavement is inscrutable. However, Ricoeur introduces Kant in this context not just under the heading of the ethical dimension but also in relation to the opposite religious view. Contrary to the ethical view, the latter is aware of the “true evil.” It reveals the evil inherent in the will to live in accordance with the law, the evil of “one’s own justice,” of “the pretension to be master of one’s life.” Ricoeur does not reveal whether this means that Kant in fact holds a religious view of evil. He does not go beyond the statement that Kant’s thinking knows about hope and promise that, consequently, alert to “the evil of evil.” This sense of hope and promise — which is pre-eminently expressed in religion — apparently pulls Kant’s thinking away from a strictly ethical view of evil. Below we must find out what this hope signifies and how it is related to evil. Subsequently, we should discuss whether or not this relation between hope and evil is characteristic of a religious view, as Ricoeur argues.

6.3.1. Hope for Fulfilment and the Danger of Totalisation

What is it that, according to Ricoeur, gives Kant this idea of hope and a corresponding awareness of true evil? It is the non-conclusive character of Kant’s philosophy of the limits, his openness towards “a sense to come.” His philosophy recognises, generally speaking, both that reason

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89 “Guilt, Ethics and Religion” Cdl 428, 429, Col 438, 439.
90 “Guilt, Ethics and Religion” Cdl 428, 429, Col 437, 439.
91 Cf. note 88 above.
92 “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 208. Note that I turn here to a different article.
is directed at a totality of meaning, at fulfilment, and that this cannot and should not be achieved here and now. The awaiting and expectance of this totality is what Ricœur calls the philosophical equivalent of hope. At the level of knowing this hope is of a merely negative nature. It discloses the idea of “absolute knowledge” as an illusion. It renounces the claim “to fulfil the thought of the unconditioned [das Unbedingte] along the line of the knowledge of empirical objects.” At the level of acting, subsequently, reason also strives for totality, i.e. the fulfilment of the will in the highest good, which is the synthesis of virtue and happiness. Here hope gains a more positive character than in the case of the faculty of knowing. The highest good is the ultimate end of morality. Not that it is given in this world; human beings cannot realise it in this world. But the postulates of immortality, God and freedom indicate that this fulfilment can be expected beyond this life. The belief in this fulfilment is a rational belief: it is rational to hope for it.

So far, this outline of Ricœur’s interpretation of the Kantian awareness of hope does not display any relation to evil. This relation is not revealed until Kant’s Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone with its doctrine of radical evil. This doctrine must be understood, according to Ricœur, in the light of the notion of hope characteristic of Kant’s philosophy of the limits in general. The link between radical evil and hope is that radical evil is the “pathology of hope,” “the inherent perversion in the problematic of fulfilment and of totalisation.” Radical or “true evil” — as Ricœur calls it — is “the fraudulency in the work of totalisation.” This radical evil — the “true evil,” “the evil of evil” — appears in the field of religion, for religion is concerned with precisely the desire of fulfilment and the recognition of the illusion of its present realisation.

93 “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 209.
94 “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 212, 213; cf. also “Freedom in the Light of Hope” Cdl 405, 406, Col 414-416. With the term “absolute knowledge” Ricœur refers to what he calls a Hegelian type of a philosophy — which should be distinguished from a Kantian type. This Hegelian type of philosophy is directed at gaining absolute knowledge that contains “nothing new” but “the philosophical repetition of antecedent mediations” (FtS 208). Thus, it does not expect a “sense to come,” as Kant’s philosophy does.
96 “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FtS 214.
97 “Freedom in the Light of Hope” Cdl 414, Col 423.
98 “Freedom in the Light of Hope” Cdl 414, Col 423.
99 “Freedom in the Light of Hope” Cdl 414, Col 423. Cf. also a later article of Ricœur: “A Philosophical Hermeneutics of Religion: Kant” Lect. III 21, FtS 76.
Thus radical evil accompanies the unfolding of the religion in its different forms as its perversion. It becomes pre-eminently visible in the attempts to realise totalisations in both political and ecclesiastical institutions. These church institutions and their possible perversions are the subjects of discussion in the final part of Religion. Thus, Ricœur equates radical evil with the evil that is the perversion of hope. This means that the awareness of hope is a condition for the discovery of evil. On the other hand, precisely in the attempt to fathom radical evil the awareness of hope is roused and accentuated. The discovery of radical evil is the discovery of freedom which has “from the beginning always chosen badly.” For this discovery one has to descend into the abyss of the motives and reasons for our acting, into the abyss of freedom. Ricœur equates this descend and the discovery of radical evil with the discovery of the transcendental illusion at the level of knowing. Both these discoveries constitute a crisis. Ricœur argues that the postulate of freedom has to face both crises. Only then is freedom discovered as a reality that is the object of hope and not something realisable in this spatio-temporal world. In these ways, Ricœur argues, Kant shows sensitivity for hope and the evil of pretensions of the realisation of the object of hope. This pretension is the formulation in terms of hope of what was previously called the pretension to be master of one’s life. The unmasking of this pretension as evil was, according to Ricœur, characteristic of a religious perspective as distinct from an ethical one. In this sense Kant may, in Ricœur’s view, be quoted to illustrate the specific character of a religious view of evil.

However, I wonder whether it is truly clarifying to resort to Kant’s thinking to show the specific character of a religious view of evil. In Ricœur’s view, the specific character of religion — which distinguishes it from, e.g., ethics — consists in its awareness of hope. Kant, subsequently, clearly shows how evil is discovered in the light of this hope. But is the basis of Kant’s awareness of hope not different from that of religion? Why is Kant’s awareness of a hope that should remain open or unfulfilled...
equated with religious hope? Can it not be just as well a critical awareness of the limits of an ethical approach that accompanies any healthy ethics? An ethical view of evil may be characterised as motivated by a desire to control evil. It holds human beings responsible for their committing evil and emphasises that this evil could have been omitted. It formulates laws; the transgression of these laws is evil. But would an ethics that strives for complete control and suggests that a life completely in accordance with the laws is possible not be a perversion of ethics also in the eyes of the ethical consciousness itself? Is the awareness of this perversion characteristic for religion as distinct from ethics, as Ricoeur argues? Does ethics not have an awareness of a hope that should remain unfulfilled?

I think that hope as such does not yet indicate an exclusively religious category. There may also be an awareness of hope within an ethical consciousness. And I think Kant’s philosophy may be a good illustration of such an “ethical hope.” But I would hesitate to call Kant’s philosophy a philosophical approximation of the religious notion of hope. Ricoeur suggests that what constitutes the core of religion — i.e. hope — may also be approximated philosophically. I wonder whether essential aspects of religion are not lost in such an approximation. I want to examine whether it is possible to further differentiate between Kant’s hope as interpreted by Ricoeur and a specifically religious hope. This examination may contribute to our general search for the specific character of a religious view of evil in the light of its end. For this examination, it seems helpful to have a closer look at the cause that initiated our discussion of Ricoeur’s interpretation of Kant: the apparent parallel between Ricoeur’s idea that religion discovers the true evil of pretending to be master of one’s life and Barth’s disclosure of the human sinful tendency to justify oneself also in thinking about evil. Does Ricoeur’s interpretation indeed reveal Kant’s view of evil to be a parallel to Barth’s critical elaboration of the retrospective view of evil?

Let us first indicate the apparent parallel between Kant’s view and Barth’s. Both of them point out the evil of pretending to be able to realise that for which we can only hope. Human beings should not pretend to be able to realise the ultimate fulfilment that only God can accomplish. They can only hope that God accomplishes it. In the light of this hope the evil

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105 For this designation “approximation” see: “Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems” FiS 216. Ricoeur also calls Kant’s approach a “philosophical analogen of the kerugma of the resurrection” (“Freedom in the Light of Hope” CdI 415, CoI 424).
of the human pretension to realise fulfilment is revealed. This may sound like a parallel. However, both the basis and the object of this hope and the corresponding evil are different in each view. Barth’s notion of hope is directed at the final end of evil when God will fulfil his purposes. The basis for this hope is that God already puts an end to evil in Christ. This basis reveals what evil is. First, it reveals evil as being God’s enemy and not that of human beings. Its power is so dangerous that only God can fight and conquer it. Secondly, it reveals the evil inherent to the human pretension to know and master evil by oneself. This pretension is an offence against God and in fact a contribution to the power of evil.

In Kant’s view as it is now presented by Ricœur, the object of hope is the highest good, i.e. the ultimate fulfilment that consists in the unity of happiness and virtue. Only God can realise this highest good. In the natural world causality does not take place in accordance with moral principles but according to laws of nature. Therefore the connection between virtue and happiness, between the moral and the natural order, can only be accomplished by a rational being with a will who is the cause of nature as a whole; this being is God. Our hope for the realisation of the highest good by God is justified because the highest good follows necessarily from the moral law as a rational principle that holds for all rational beings. It is clear that this idea of hope is based on moral principles. From the moral law follows the hope for fulfilment of the highest good by God. This fulfilment consists in the removal of the fundamental incompatibility of the natural and the moral order that characterises our present existence. This moral nature of the basis and object of Kant’s hope leads, in the end, to a different view of evil. In the light of hope evil is revealed to be the denial of the finite human nature. Evil is the pretension to be master of one’s life in a sense in which only God can be master: only God is able to unify the natural and the moral order. In Barth’s view, evil does not coincide with this denial of human finiteness but with the denial of human dependence on God. It is the denial that only God can put an end to evil. It is the denial of the radical nature of evil that indicates that human beings can never liberate themselves from it. This points to an important difference between Barth and Kant — and thus between a religious and an ethical view. However, one may immediately object: Does not precisely Kant’s qualification of evil as radical indicate that he is also aware of this side of evil?

106 “Freedom in the Light of Hope” CdI 411, CoI 421.
6.3.2. Radical Evil and Hope for Regeneration

The question just raised already indicates that Ricœur’s interpretation of Kant’s radical evil in line with the problem of transcendental illusion and the highest good does not grasp the whole of Kant’s notion of radical evil. There is also a side to it that highlights what Ricœur calls “the enslavement of freedom,” freedom which has “from the beginning always chosen badly.” 107 This aspect does not seem to be the same as the evil of totalisation. Even if human beings have a correct understanding of their finite nature and freedom — i.e. understand that they cannot realise the highest good in this world — they may be called radically evil. Radical evil then refers to the evil of making a fundamental choice against the moral law, against a free acting in accordance with this law. We should remember what Kant means by the attribute “radical” in the first Part of Religion. Basically, this radicality refers to the fact that evil “corrupts the ground of all maxims” and cannot “be extirpated through human forces.” 108 Kant more or less equates it with the term “innate.” 109 The notion of radical evil is used to describe the moral nature of human beings. In comparison to this general meaning, the evil of totalisation appears to be a specific form of evil — and in this sense “the evil of evil,” evil in its most dangerous form.

Why does Kant present evil as extending to the most fundamental maxim, which precedes all use of freedom in experience? First, this must be understood in the light of his view of freedom. Every evil act must be regarded as freely committed in order to be imputable to human beings. This means that every decision against the moral law is free: it is caused by a freely chosen evil maxim. Every evil maxim thus presupposes another evil maxim that was freely adopted. Although it is impossible to reach the first ground in the analysis of this line of maxims, it is necessary to presuppose a fundamental level: that of the evil maxim that precedes all specific evil maxims. Every evil act thus implies a fundamental choice against the moral law. Kant emphasises this against views that trace evil back to some natural cause for which human beings cannot be held responsible. As this fundamental choice determines human moral nature one must conclude, secondly, that human beings are always either

107 See notes 90 and 101 above.
108 RiG 37, RwL 83.
109 RiG 32, RwL 80.
good or evil, but never something in between. As maxims have a universal character, they are always related to the most fundamental level of our acting. If somebody “is good in one part, he has incorporated the moral law into his maxim,” i.e. “he has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself.” Thus he cannot be evil in some other part at the same time. Moreover, it is impossible, according to Kant, to be indifferent as regards the moral law: one always incorporates either the moral law or another incentive into one’s maxim. Thus, from the experience that people commit evil it must be deduced that they have an evil first ground of their action, which is freely chosen. In this sense Kant uses the term “radical evil.” As we have seen in the analysis of the first Part of Religion, he concludes in a rather obscure argumentation that human beings in general adopt this fundamental evil maxim and should thus be called radically evil. A revolution to the good must, however, be possible in spite of this radical evil. But one should not forget that human beings always start from evil — that is what Kant understands by radical evil.

At first, it seems quite obvious to see a parallel between this meaning of the notion of radical evil and a religious understanding of evil in the light of its end. For this radical nature of evil seems to imply a fundamental critique of the human tendency to justify oneself. It criticises the idea that they may become good by themselves. The end of evil does not seem to be something human beings can realise themselves. Moreover, Kant emphasises that this radical evil is something for which human beings are fully responsible. All this seems to be a parallel to the religious retrospective view of evil as found in Barth’s view. In a later article Ricœur also seems to suggest this interpretation. Here he argues that for Kant the “existential-historical condition of evil” is the “challenge” to which religion answers with an “in spite of.” The enigmatic factual situation “that our actual will is a bound will” actuates religion. This expression “in spite of” reminds us of Ricœur’s characterisation of religious representations of the end of evil. Here he does not use this concept of “the end of evil” but the term hope: “this tie between challenge and reply is
the tie of hope." Kant’s *Religion* is subsequently characterised by Ricœur as a “philosophical hermeneutics of hope.” This hope is directed at regeneration, at the possibility of becoming good in spite of radical evil by means of a revolution. Religion offers the “very operation that is this revolution in human disposition.” Do we then find here the parallel to a religious sense of hope and a corresponding view of evil — something we did not find in Kant’s hope for fulfilment?

Here again we should first understand what Kant means by this hope in order to determine whether it may be a parallel to religious hope. At what is this hope directed? Kant’s notion of hope is directed at becoming good or virtuous, at living in accordance with the moral law. In this sense the notion already figures in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Here Kant argues that human beings may hope to become good eventually, not in this life but “in the endlessness of their duration (which God alone can survey).” If they make progress in their moral acting they may hope that this progress continues also beyond this life. But in the second *Critique* we do not find the notion of a radical evil.  The problem of becoming good is here caused only by the human openness to incentives other than that of the moral law. Human beings do not have a holy will and their will is thus never completely in conformity with the moral law — conformity that is a necessary condition for the highest good. This is another reason why the highest good cannot be realised in this world and remains the object of hope. In *Religion*, however, the problem of becoming good receives another dimension: it becomes the problem of the return to the good of a radically evil human being, i.e. regeneration.

As a result, hope seems to acquire another dimension as well. The hope of becoming good in spite of radical evil is stronger or deeper than the hope of becoming good in spite of the human inability to become holy. That which must be conquered in order to realise the good is more complex in the former case than in the latter.

However, both in the second *Critique* and *Religion* Kant uses similar arguments to found the legitimacy of this hope. First of all, he argues...
that because the moral law demands that human beings must become good they must be able to do this, even if they are radically evil. This means that they must do it “by the exertion of their own power” because only then can this be imputed to them.\textsuperscript{122} Hence, we are right in hoping that this turn to the good is possible. An additional argument found in \textit{Religion} is that the radical evil in human beings does not undo the original disposition to the good.\textsuperscript{123} Therefore, it always remains possible to return to it: the original disposition can be restored in its power. This disposition to the good means, among other things, that human beings have respect for the moral law as something which is “of itself a sufficient incentive to their power of choice.”\textsuperscript{124} From these arguments it is clear that also in the case of regeneration Kant’s hope is based on moral principles — just as in the case of hope for fulfilment. Here, this moral principle is that human beings are rational beings who know the moral law and therefore must be able to keep it. The condition for this hope is that human beings try as hard as they can to keep the moral law, to perform the revolution to the good. If they do this they are right in hoping that their becoming good will continue. Hope concerns those aspects of becoming good that we cannot fully understand but which we may reasonably assume on the basis of the moral law.

So far, Kant’s notion of hope for regeneration in spite of radical evil seems to be motivated without any reference to God. It is true that Kant does not mention God primarily in his foundation of this hope; God’s role in this hope is only of secondary importance. But we find references to a supernatural dimension in relation to the hope for some cooperation in becoming good.\textsuperscript{125} However, the status of this supernatural cooperation is problematic within Kant’s rational religion. It is impossible to know anything about it. Moreover, focussing on this supernatural cooperation distracts the attention from the only thing that is truly important as regards becoming a good human being, i.e. what we should do ourselves to become good.\textsuperscript{126} Thus, although God plays a role in how human beings become good, this does not alter the fact that everything depends in the first place on human beings themselves. Again, the condition for the hope

\textsuperscript{122} RiG 51, RwL 95.
\textsuperscript{123} RiG 44, RwL 89.
\textsuperscript{124} RiG 27, RwL 76.
\textsuperscript{125} RiG 52, RwL 95; cf. in the other parts of \textit{Religion} e.g. RiG 101, 116-118, 171-172, RwL 135, 147-149, 190-192.
\textsuperscript{126} See Chapter 3, pp. 137-140.
turns out to be that human beings make themselves worthy of receiving it.\footnote{RiG 44, RwL 89.}

This deliberate passing over of God’s role seems to be characteristic of Kant’s view as a whole.

On further consideration it is clear that the suggested parallel between Kant’s notion of radical evil and a religious view does not seem to exist. For Kant, the radical character of evil does not imply a fundamental critique of the human ability to become good. Human beings still possess these abilities in spite of their radical evil moral nature. In a certain sense Kant almost seems to spur people on to justify themselves by emphasising that they should make themselves worthy of justification. It is true that the final justification is something only God can accomplish.\footnote{This becomes especially clear in a section in Part Two where Kant discusses the problem that, even if human beings achieve the revolution to the good, they always start from evil (RiG 72-78, RwL 112-117).} But this is not the basis of our hope for justification. This basis lies in the moral law that demands that we should become good human beings and in the original human disposition to the good.

This means that here the “in spite of” to which Ricoër pointed as a parallel to religious hope is of a quite different nature from the one found in the symbols and myths of evil. The function of this idea in Kant’s view is to encourage people to turn to the good. It lays emphasis on the human ability to realise this good. Thus, one wonders whether in this view the tension of the “not yet” of this realisation, the unfulfilled nature of the hope expressed in the “in spite of” can be endured. In the symbols and myths, however, the “in spite of” is founded on the notion of the end of evil as accomplished by God. From this perspective the human abilities to realise this end are fundamentally criticised, as Barth’s view shows. The human dependence on God is expressed in this view. In the light of the end of evil that God accomplishes it is revealed what evil is. This also means that it becomes clear what the evil is that we should resist and fight — thus, what we should do. But there is a crucial difference as to whether this is revealed on the basis of the moral law or on the basis of God’s accomplishment of this end. In the first case all attention is focused on what human beings should do; in the second instance the starting point is God’s acting. The second view implies a more radical view of evil than the first: evil is something from which human beings must be liberated by God. From this comparison of Kant’s view with a religious
view like Barth’s it is apparent how crucial the role of God is in the religious representations. The representation of the end of evil as something God accomplishes entails a very critical elaboration of the human relations with evil.

The close relation between a radical view of evil and the idea that God makes an end to evil is clearly shown in a critical interpretation that Barth gives of Kant’s Religion. I will conclude this section by referring to this interpretation. According to Barth, Kant’s project of a rational religion runs into trouble precisely because of the central position the notion of radical evil occupies in it. Difficulties arise because the notion of radical evil cannot be incorporated without taking into account the notion of salvation. In Barth’s interpretation, Kant’s notion of radical evil forces him to go more deeply into the issue of salvation than his project of a philosophy of religion as such demands and can bear. For the idea of a salvation granted by God is, of course, at odds with the principle of Kant’s moral religion that the human change of heart is what matters. Therefore, the status of the concepts dealing with this salvation — Barth mentions “vicarious atonement, justification, forgiveness, re-birth and even predestination” — is equivocal. Partly, Kant treats them as parerga, side issues, which do not belong within rational religion. Nonetheless, Kant does deal with them — in appendices — because, as he says, “reason extends itself” to these “extravagant ideas.” And, apart from these appendices, the notions related to salvation also figure in the main text. Kant does not refute these “strange visitors from another world” — although he avoids them. These “neighbouring fields” do not just function as limits. Barth calls them borders or frontiers (Ränder). This term indicates that they occupy a certain space, that Kant leaves space for these notions and pays attention to them, albeit in

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129 This interpretation can be found in the chapter on Immanuel Kant in Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert, op. cit.
130 Cf. Kant’s remark that “to expect an effect of grace means ... that the good (the morally good) is not of our doing, but of another being — that we, therefore, can only come by it by doing nothing ….” (RI 53, RwL 97).
132 Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert, op. cit., 268; Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, op. cit., 301. This is a quotation from RI 52, RwL 96.
133 Barth mentions e.g. RI 66, 76, 171, RwL 108, 116, 190 (Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert, op. cit., 266; Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, op. cit., 298).
an ambiguous way.\textsuperscript{135} This ambiguity is expressed, Barth argues, in the equivocal term Kant uses to designate the relation between rational religion and the \textit{parerga}: they border or abut upon \textit{(anstoßen an)} the rational religion, which can signify both peaceful adjoining and violent clashing. The ambiguous status of the concepts of salvation has repercussions for the whole reasoning based on the notion of radical evil. Because the idea of divine salvation or justification cannot achieve what it should “achieve in view of the radical evil, according to Kant’s own premises,” the whole project of a rational religion is weakened.\textsuperscript{136}

Behind this critical analysis of Kant’s project of developing a rational religion on the basis of the notion of radical evil lies Barth’s conviction that human beings do not have insight into this evil on their own. Kant presents his notion of radical evil as a general idea of which the meaning can be easily explained in ethical terms and which serves as a good starting point for a rational religion. In the chapter on nothingness in the \textit{Church Dogmatics} Barth criticises this idea of speaking about evil as if it were a general, common notion. He argues that it is the “question whether this dark stain can be so directly perceived, identified, analysed and assessed as though it were one phenomenon among others, or whether knowledge of this phenomenon is not a question of faith and therefore in the strict sense a theological question.”\textsuperscript{137} It is this “theological character” that Barth points out in the relation between radical evil and salvation in the chapter on Kant in \textit{Protestant Theology}. Kant’s text confirms this relation, even though it cannot truly incorporate it.

Our detailed discussion of the question of whether parallels to a religious view of evil can be found in Kant’s thinking ends in a negative conclusion. At first sight there do seem to be similar patterns of thought as regards the relation between hope and evil. But on closer investigation one finds significant differences from a religious view like Barth’s. The basis and object of hope and the notion of evil related to it are different.


\textsuperscript{137} KD III/3 357, CD 313. This remark is in the first place directed at Julius Müller (1801-1878) who wrote an important book on sin, \textit{Die Christliche Lehre von der Sünde}, published between 1838-1844. But, subsequently, Barth parallels his view with Kant’s (KD III/3 357, CD 314).
All this confirms that in a religious context evil receives a specific meaning for which the notion of an end of evil accomplished by God is crucial. The critical impetus that the view of evil receives in this context also seems characteristic. Because these aspects cannot be incorporated into Kant’s view, his notion of evil is narrower. He cannot account completely for the radical character of evil and, consequently, the critical impetus of the notion. For Kant, the danger of reflecting on evil lies primarily in that it is regarded as something for which we are not fully responsible. This focus corresponds with the ethical character of his thinking. But because of this focus he misses the danger of representing evil as something we control. Is it, then, possible to say that in the religious context there seems to be an awareness of both dangers? As a final critical objection to this idea we will turn to Jaspers’ view. In Jaspers’ thinking we find a strong awareness of the dangers of reflection on evil. In this critique he also takes into consideration the notion of the end of evil.

6.4. Deliverance in a Tragic View of Evil

In our discussion of a possible specific content of the notion of evil in a religious context the aspect of the criticism implied in a radical view like Barth’s has become central. The danger that accompanies reflection on evil has been linked to a fundamental human inclination to misunderstand evil. People are inclined to represent evil in a harmless way. By means of these misconceptions human beings try to absolve themselves from complicity in evil. These conceptions thus suit the desire to justify oneself. However, Jaspers’ reflections on evil also display a very critical tone. For example, Jaspers appreciates Kant’s view of evil because of its attention for the inscrutability of evil. He argues that in this way the danger of representing evil as some specific object is avoided. In Jaspers’ view, Kant urges people to find evil in themselves, in the origin of their acting and thus preserves them from absolving themselves from complicity in evil. In general, Jaspers’ philosophy shows an aversion to the ideal of complete knowledge. He emphasises the importance of the historical appropriation of knowledge in one’s personal situation. Also, Jaspers’ preference for the form of the “ciphers” to communicate philosophical insights may be seen as an example of this critical attitude. And the central importance of the notion of “foundering” (*Scheitern*) in Jaspers’ thinking is another example. Foundering extends to knowledge and philosophy itself: it implies a critique of the pretensions of human
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metaphysical reflection.\textsuperscript{138} It is precisely this criticism of the philosophical drive to know and understand that is also apparent from the close affinity between Jaspers’ thinking and that which he calls “tragic knowing” — which is more like “not knowing.”\textsuperscript{139}

Jaspers’ awareness of the dangers of reflection on evil is not based on an opposition between natural, human thinking on evil and divine revelation as found in Barth. Still, we also find in Jaspers’ thinking the idea that our first, intuitive views of evil should be corrected. He assigns to philosophy, among other things, the task of interpreting our experiences of meaningless foundering into occasions for discovering Being (Sein).

The impetus for these interpretations is, however, something to which people are already inclined by themselves. The situation of the human beings in the world drives them to certain thoughts and questions. Philosophy induces people to deal with these questions in such a way that they may become a self or Existenz in their specific historical situation. This means that philosophy should link up with personal experiences, according to Jaspers. Impressive negative experiences like death, suffering, struggle and guilt, are pre-eminently occasions for becoming Existenz. These experiences can be illuminated as boundary situations, i.e. as opportunities to break finite existence (Dasein) open towards Being, or Transcendence.\textsuperscript{140} However, the factual situations of death, suffering etc. as such are not boundary situations. They only arise if there is a certain awareness of Being. Only if these situations are seized as an opening towards Transcendence do they become boundary situations. This means that philosophy gives an interpretation of evil phenomena: that which seems meaningless at first is interpreted with an eye to Transcendence or Being.\textsuperscript{141}

A distinction that makes a similar reference is that between factual foundering and real foundering.\textsuperscript{142} Jaspers means here that we should deal with experiences of ruin and failure as occasions for discovering Being. Being appears pre-eminently in foundering because it can never fully realise itself without resistance in our finite existence. Again, the term “interpretation” seems appropriate to indicate what happens here:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{138} See Chapter 4, pp. 177, 178.
\item \textsuperscript{139} See Chapter 4, p. 181.
\item \textsuperscript{140} E.g. VdW 925: “Im Scheitern ist das Sein nicht verloren, sondern gerade ganz und entschieden fühlbar.”
\item \textsuperscript{141} E.g. VdW 918: “In diesen Anschauungen ist Philosophie verborgen, denn sie deuten das zunächst Sinnlose des Unheils.” Cf. Chapter 4, note 140.
\item \textsuperscript{142} See Chapter 4, pp. 175, 176, note 119.
\end{itemize}
we experience real foundering if negative situations are interpreted in the light of Transcendence. Thus our awareness of Being may correct our experiences of failure as meaningless.

Expressions like opening, breaking open or transcending existence (*Dasein*) towards Being (*Sein*) suggest that foundering also means a change in the situation of misery. This may be related to the idea of an end of evil. In his analysis of tragic consciousness Jaspers relates this moment of change to the tragic idea of deliverance (*Erlösung*). By the term “the tragic” Jaspers indicates precisely the moment of transcending. From the beginning the drive for deliverance is related to the tragic. This deliverance is found in the act of becoming oneself, which is based on the encounter with Being in existence. Thus, one may say that the encounter with Being or becoming oneself in transcending, is an interpretation of the evil phenomenon that is at the same time a liberation or deliverance.

Still, this deliverance must be understood in a specific sense. Jaspers points out the difference between deliverance *in* the tragic and *from* the tragic. The deliverance that takes place *in* the tragic concerns attitudes like suffering, holding out, enduring and standing. In a continuing confrontation with misery the presence of Being may be experienced, which Jaspers also indicates by the term illumination (*Erhellung*). But the tragic is not overcome in this deliverance; rather, the tension between existence and Being is endured and borne. In the “downfall of the finite” human beings witness the “reality and truth of the infinite.” This kind of deliverance *in* the tragic seems most in line with what Jaspers envisages himself. In the deliverance *from* the tragic, however, this tension between existence and Being seems to vanish; the tragic is left behind as one dwells entirely upon the pole of Being.

As an example of deliverance from the tragic, Jaspers refers to Christian tragedy that overcomes the tragic by the idea of a different world. 

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143 “die Offenbarkeit des Seins im Scheitern wird angesichts des Tragischen erfahren. Im Tragischen geschieht das Transzendieren über Elend und Schrecken hinaus zum Grunde der Dinge hin” (VdW 947).
144 “Mit dem Wissen des Tragischen verbindet sich von Anbeginn der Drang zur Erlösung” (VdW 926). See Chapter 4, pp. 180, 181.
145 VdW 945.
146 “ertragen” (VdW 926, 945) “standhalten” (id. 946) “dulden” (id. 946) “aushalten” (id. 926, 946).
147 VdW 926.
148 “Im Untergang des Endlichen schaut der Mensch die Wirklichkeit und Wahrheit des Unendlichen” (VdW 947).
149 VdW 949. As major examples of this Christian tragedy Jaspers mentions Calderón and Racine (VdW 919).
Contrary to the deliverance in the tragic — which regards Being only as something in foundering, i.e., an immanent Being — this view depicts a complete deliverance from the misery and ruin of the world. Jaspers relates the origin of this idea of a complete deliverance from a universal misery to a religion of “prophets and saviours.” Furthermore, he opposes his idea of deliverance in the tragic to philosophical systematisations of the tragic or tragic worldviews (Weltanschauungen). In these views Being is made absolute and finite by, for example, declaring it to be the value and essence of human existence. This view forgets about deliverance that is always the reverse of the tragic. It perceives only misery, misfortune, downfall, death; the “only-tragic” (das Nurtragische) remains. This is not “tragic knowing” — which is always characterised by openness, incompleteness, by not knowing (Nichtwissen). Tragic knowing never gives a complete interpretation of the world, of universal suffering or of all terrible and unsolvable aspects of human existence. Tragic knowing cannot be absolutised but is always related to specific visions (Anschauungen), to representations and ideas in time. In these visions deliverance is experienced — not by means of a “doctrine or revelation” but “with a view to order, justice, love for human beings; in trust; in leaving open; in the question as such without an answer.”

In this distinction between deliverance in the tragic and from the tragic one recognises Jaspers’ general critique of knowing and reflection as regards evil. He does not want to speak in terms of a universal evil or misery that corresponds to a universal, complete deliverance in which evil is overcome. Over against such views he poses his tragic knowing, which is
concerned with the specific evil that occurs in a specific situation and which may become a boundary situation for the human being experiencing it. In the boundary situation deliverance of a transcending towards Being may be experienced. This experience is not induced by a general notion of deliverance — just as the immediate cause of the evil occurrence is not seen as an example of universal evil. Jaspers does not elaborate on the specific dangers of this speaking in terms of universal evil or complete deliverance. But the solution of the tension between existence and Being seems to be a possible danger.

We may relate this to our critique on the lack of brokenness in Barth’s reflection on nothingness. Barth does not elaborate on the tension between the defeat of evil and its reality. The fact that our knowledge of God is always broken is not clearly apparent in all his reflections on nothingness. In addition, Jaspers’ critique seems to point at the danger of not being personally called to account by reflections on evil. This is in line with his view in his article on Kant where he argues that reflection on evil should spur people on to find evil in themselves instead of placing it outside of them. When Barth focuses at some points in his reflection completely on the fact that nothingness is conquered by God the impetus to such personal involvement in this struggle does not seem to be strong. Moreover, because he also does not refer in these passages to the aspects in which the reality of evil appears, one may criticise his view at these points of failing to give sufficient impetus to our human struggle against evil. Of course, the danger of an all too enthusiastic struggle against evil is that evil is not taken seriously enough. But the other extreme is dangerous as well. Jaspers correctly points to the need of personal appropriation of knowledge, especially where evil is concerned. Reflection on evil should lead to that.

Still, one may wonder whether Jaspers’ thinking itself does enough to induce one to this. With the religious view of evil in the back of our minds we may ask several counterquestions. First of all, Jaspers cannot escape talking in general terms. His reflection is formulated in general terms and is not, for example, a highly personal account of a specific confrontation with some evil and a specific deliverance. But the question is whether this general language and these general ideas give enough of an impetus to induce people to live their personal struggle with evil in order to become a self. Or, to formulate it negatively, does Jaspers’ view succeed in giving people insight into the danger of objectifying evil or claiming complete understanding? Does Jaspers’ reflection confront people with their own inclination to do this, which Jaspers seems to presuppose?
Again, we may find a discrepancy here between the critical tenor of reflection on evil and the view of human beings that lies behind it. We saw this discrepancy in Kant’s view. Kant’s awareness of the danger of totalisation and the radical character of human evil did not correspond with his emphasis on the human ability to perform the revolution to the good on one’s own. Here one wonders whether Jaspers should not have been more sceptical about the human ability to resist the objectification and totalisation of evil if he is so critical of the human ability to know. But we do not find something like the idea of radical evil in Jaspers’ thinking. He does not elaborate on the specific background of his conviction that human beings should be induced to find evil in themselves. Also in his interpretation of Kant’s radical evil he does not go into the idea that human beings should be regarded as evil by nature. He focuses all attention on the inscrutability of evil. Thus, one wonders whether his view of evil contains enough to nourish a critical attitude towards interpretations of evil. What is it that eventually founds his critical attitude?

This doubt is deepened by the lack of moral connotations that we find in Jaspers’ dealing with evil. For his approach the task of gaining insight into the inevitability of evil is very important. Especially in relation to a moral problem like guilt this approach does not seem to guarantee a fundamentally critical attitude.

Moreover, one wonders whether Jaspers’ intention to induce people to endure the tension between existence and Being at the moment of foundering does not need a stronger notion of Being. For this idea of Being should function as a counterpart to the misery of existence. Does it contain enough to fulfil this task? Jaspers’ notion of Being is consciously kept empty, not given any content. This does not seem to make it easy to appropriate it in our own attempts to discover Being in our experiences of meaninglessness. Thus, at several points the critical tenor of Jaspers’ reflection on evil may itself be criticised for not having enough substance.

This comparison with Jaspers’ view of evil again brings differences with a religious view to light. Jaspers’ critical attitude as regards reflection on evil is motivated by something other than what motivates Barth’s. Again, these differences are further illuminated by taking into account the notion of an end of evil. In Jasper’s tragic view, the idea of a general deliverance from evil is approached critically. It would entail the danger of solving the tension between existence and Being and of speaking in too general a way that claims completeness. Thus, representations of a definitive end of evil are not found in Jaspers’ thinking. Rather, he wants to give insight into
the inevitable character of evil. As I have argued in the chapter on Jaspers’ thinking the question is justified as to whether evil is still a distinct category in this view. The notion of evil seems to merge into that of the human condition. Moreover, the offensive character seems to decrease because evil, in the sense of foundering, is inevitable for experiencing Being. The critical impetus of Jaspers’ view, its power to induce people to fight evil, may be doubted. His critical view is neither elaborate enough nor related to his view of human beings and his idea of Being.

6.5. The Specific Character of a Religious View of Evil

Our investigation into the notion of the end of evil has brought to light further differences between ethical, tragic and religious ways of dealing with evil. In the religious view the end of evil is something that is accomplished by God and not by human beings. Both Ricœur and Barth make clear that before God evil never appears as something over which human beings have complete control. On the one hand, they are guilty of this evil. But they cannot liberate themselves or the world from it. This deliverance is regarded as coming from outside, “from above.” Moreover, it is not just partly and something of the present moment but also represented as a complete deliverance from evil at the end of time. The images of a time without evil imply a critique of the present world. In the light of these images the evil of the present world is disclosed very clearly. Thus the images of the end of evil put the present situation under tension. They accuse human beings. Moreover, they reveal the absurd nature of evil as a rejection of the end of evil offered by God. In this context evil becomes a term for all those phenomena that are not in keeping with this other world, the world as it should be. But this world without evil is not yet present; neither can it be realised by human beings alone. It is something to hope for in spite of the fact that evil is still very much present. Insofar there is an almost tragic tension, an enduring of the “not yet,” and the awareness that this end cannot be enforced by human beings. Evil is a distinct category but not in the sense that it can be grasped completely.

Subsequently, I focused attention on the critical impetus of this religious view of evil. Can it offer resistance to the danger of becoming either too vague a notion or too clear or absolute a category? This critique also arises from the examination of the notion of the end of evil in Kant’s ethical and Jaspers’ tragic view. Kant’s ethical view of the end of evil turned out to differ from this religious view in that attention was
focused on the end of evil insofar as human beings are able to bring it about. This means that evil is approached primarily as something with which people should come to grips, even though they cannot put an end to it on their own in the present world. Emphasis lies on the human predisposition to the good and the human duty to follow the moral law. Eventually evil is seen as something controllable, even though the final control belongs to God. Thus, Kant warns against religious views that regard the end of evil as something that is wholly in God’s hands and to which people have nothing to contribute. These views distract attention from what human beings can and should do. Jaspers’ tragic view opposes the idea of a general deliverance from a universal evil. The end of evil is not a complete deliverance but only the momentary appearance of Being in existence. This approach seems to imply a critique of religious views that know too well what evil and deliverance consist in and do not induce people to experience the tension between these things in their own lives.

The criticisms of Kant and Jaspers make clear that in the religious view these dangers are very acutely present, while at the same time there are impulses that counterbalance this danger. In the religious context evil becomes a distinct category. This may give occasion for the dangerous claim to know evil. But the reverse of this “becoming distinct” is that human beings cannot put an end to evil. This turns evil into something over which human beings never have complete control. Still, it is a serious problem with which they have to deal because they bear responsibility for it. The critical weight of the religious view of evil consists in a fundamental doubt of the human ability to know and solve the problem of evil. But that is not because evil is not a problem for human beings but because they are too much bound up with it. Because of this close relation to evil they have to distrust their own dealing with evil and gauge their views on the point of the end of evil as accomplished by God. This critical weight may counterbalance the dangers of this view.

Kant and Jaspers thus make us aware of the dangers of a religious view of evil. However, they also show the limitations of views that focus one-sidedly on an ethical or a tragic view of evil. Their criticism contributes to their one-sidedness so that there is no room for a truly ambiguous and absurd notion of evil. In comparison with Kant’s ethical and Jaspers’ tragic view, the notion of evil in a religious context is most broad or most rich in meaning. Therefore, this broad notion can function as a critical perspective for other views of evil. This does not mean that evil only makes sense as a religious term. But the wealth of meaning the notion of evil receives in the religious context indicates that it seems most at home in
this context. Many aspects of the notion of evil can be illuminated by taking into account the context in which it is most at home. In my view, it is pre-eminently the task of a philosophy of religion to perform this illumination. Thus we may become aware of what is lost when the term evil disappears from our thinking about human beings and the world. There is a threat of this disappearance if reflection is narrowed to the human dimension alone — if there is no place for the sacred. This means that we lose affinity with something in ourselves and in the world that we should not lose sight of — even though we never gain full insight into it either.
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Reconsidering Evil. Confronting Reflections with Confessions
[“Terugkomen op het kwaad.
Een confrontatie van reflecties met bekentenissen”]

Dit boek is de neerslag van een godsdienstwijsgerig onderzoek naar de aard en de status van de notie van het kwaad. Doel van het onderzoek is een herijking van deze notie, dat wil zeggen: een opnieuw ontdekken van de context of het discours waarin het spreken over het kwaad het meest thuis is. Met deze doelstelling gaat deze studie in tegen twee tegenstrijdige hedendaagse tendensen. Enerzijds is er sprake van een “ontmanteling” van de notie van het kwaad. Men ziet af van de algemene noemer “het kwaad” om enkel nog te spreken van afzonderlijke kwade dingen. Anderzijds wordt de term “het kwaad” veelvuldig gebruikt in het publieke debat. Dit gebruik lijkt echter niet organisch deel uit te maken van een bepaalde manier van denken. Het onderhavige onderzoek gaat ervan uit dat de notie van het kwaad wèl zinvol gebruikt kan worden in ons denken over mens en wereld. Daarbij worden de gevaren van dit gebruik onderkend en is er aandacht voor het fundamentele probleem hoe in reflectie recht kan worden gedaan aan ervaringen van kwaad. De hypothese die het onderzoek richting geeft, is dat de notie van het kwaad het meest thuis is in een religieuze manier van denken. Aan de hand van vier denkers, die verschillende visies op het kwaad representeren, wordt deze hypothese getoetst. Het gaat om Paul Ricœur, Immanuel Kant, Karl Jaspers en Karl Barth. In hoofdstuk 1 van dit boek worden vraag- en doelstelling, alsmede de methode van het onderzoek uiteengezet en de keuze van de auteurs beargumenteerd tegen de achtergrond van hedendaagse discussies.

Het tweede hoofdstuk gaat in op de benadering van het kwaad zoals die te vinden is in het vroege werk van Ricœur. Zijn benadering vervult een spilfunctie in ons onderzoek. Bij hem vinden we zowel bewustzijn van het problematische karakter van reflectie op het kwaad als aandacht voor ervaringen van kwaad. Bovendien heeft hij oog voor de mogelijke religieuze aspecten. Opvallend in dit vroege werk is Ricœurs hermeneutische analyse van prefilosofische symbolen van het kwaad. De uitgewerkte filosofie van het kwaad die op deze hermeneutiek had moeten volgen
heeft hij uiteindelijk niet meer geschreven. In ons onderzoek wordt nagegaan of de uitkomsten van Ricœurs hermeneutische analyse alsnog vruchtbaar kunnen worden gemaakt voor een reflexieve benadering van het kwaad. Daartoe is het in de eerste plaats van belang om Ricœurs keuze voor een benadering via de symbolen te begrijpen binnen het geheel van zijn vroege filosofische werk over het thema van de wil. Kenmerkend is hier de “passie voor het mogelijke”. Het kwaad is niet iets dat tot de fundamentele structuren van de menselijke wil behoort, maar een absurditeit. Fundamenteel is wel de disproportie tussen eindigheid en oneindigheid. Die maakt de mens feilbaar. Feilbaarheid is echter iets anders dan de fout of het kwaad zelf. Ricœur wil het kwaad niet als een gegeven benaderen, maar de overgang van feilbaarheid naar fout. Daartoe richt hij zich op het moment van de bekentenis (confession). De taal van de fout is de taal van de bekentenis: een symbolische taal die vraagt om een hermeneutische analyse. Bovendien is deze taal religieus.

Ricœur onderscheidt drie niveaus in de bekentenis van het kwaad: symbolen, mythen en speculatie. Symbolen zijn de uitdrukkingen die het dichtst bij ervaringen van het kwaad staan. Ze vatten het kwaad in een enkel beeld. Ricœur analyseert drie typen van symbolen: smet, zonde en schuld. Deze typen vinden hun eenheid in het concept van de “slaafse wil” (serf-arbitre) dat duidelijk de dubbelzinnigheid van het spreken over het kwaad toont. In de mythen worden de symbolen deel van een verhaal; het kwaad maakt deel uit van een geschiedenis. Ricœur onderscheidt hier vier typen. Het belangrijkste verschil daartussen ligt in de relatie van de mens tot het kwaad. In de antropologische mythe van Adam en Eva in de Hof van Eden is het kwaad een zaak van de mens. In de andere drie mythen is dat niet het geval: daar geldt het kwaad als iets dat er altijd al was, als iets buiten de wil van de mensen om, als hun lot. De visie van eerstgenoemde mythe is te karakteriseren als ethisch, die van de andere drie als tragisch. In tweede instantie zijn er echter in de antropologische mythe ook tragische elementen als keerzijde van de ethische visie te ontdekken, wat opnieuw duidt op een dubbelzinnigheid. Ook op het niveau van de speculatie, tenslotte, is het van belang de dubbelzinnigheid te ontkennen, bijvoorbeeld in het “rationele symbool” van de erfzonde. In speculatie wordt deze dubbelzinnigheid eerder gewantrouwd dan onderkend — reden waarom Ricœur een “omweg” via symbolen en mythen nodig achtte. Deze omweg wordt in hoofdstuk 2 geanalyseerd. Zo is het mogelijk de taal van het kwaad te verkennen zonder dat die tot een samenhangende filosofie van het kwaad wordt omgesmeed. Uit deze
analyse komt een aantal systematische vragen naar voren dat Ricœur zelf niet bespreekt, juist omdat hij niet tot de beloofde filosofie van het kwaad overgaat. Waarom wordt het spreken over het kwaad gekenmerkt door dubbelzinnigheid? En waarom is dit spreken religieus van aard? Wat is precies het probleem van een reflexieve benadering van het kwaad als onderscheiden van een symbolische of mythische? Deze vragen keren terug bij de analyse van de visies van de overige auteurs, hetgeen bijdraagt tot de kritische verwerking van Ricœurs visie.

In hoofdstuk 3 wordt Kants visie op het kwaad behandeld. Kant spreekt pas met enige uitvoerigheid over dit thema in zijn late werk over de redelijke religie, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*. Zijn benadering van het kwaad zou in Ricœurs termen kunnen worden omschreven als een voorbeeld van speculatie: een filosofisch onderzoek met redelijkheid als centraal criterium. Daarom is deze benadering geschikt om de implicaties van Ricœurs analyse voor reflectie op het kwaad verder te onderzoeken. Bovendien lijkt in Kants benadering een ethische visie dominant te zijn — reden waarom hij zich goed leent voor een verdere doordenking van de dubbelzinnigheid in het spreken over het kwaad. Tot slot is zijn visie relevant voor ons onderzoek, omdat hij het kwaad juist in zijn boek over de religie ter sprake brengt. De vraag is, wat dit onthult over de relatie tussen religie en het thema van het kwaad.

Kant behandelt het thema van het kwaad in zijn boek over religie meteen in het eerste deel, onder de titel “over het radicale kwaad in de menselijke natuur”. Om deze inzet beter te kunnen begrijpen, wordt de blik eerst gericht op de *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. Daarin speelt het thema van het kwaad nauwelijks een rol. Alle aandacht gaat uit naar de mogelijkheid het goede te kennen en het te doen. Des te opmerkelijker is het dat Kant deze ethiek in zijn boek over de religie als basis neemt, en toch wil spreken over het radicale kwaad. Het resultaat is dan ook niet zonder problemen. In Kants verhandeling over het radicale kwaad ontstaat een grote spanning tussen de voorstellingen van het kwaad als vrije daad enerzijds en als “aangeboren” en “radicaal” kenmerk van de morele natuur van de mens anderzijds. Uiteindelijk komt Kant in zijn doorvoering van de morele natuur van de mens toch tot de conclusie dat die kwaad is, zonder dat dit evenwel iets afdoet aan het menselijk vermogen om terug te keren tot het goede. Dit herstel van het goede is volgens Kant het centrale thema van de redelijke religie. Om dat thema te kunnen verwoorden heeft Kant de notie van een kwade menselijke natuur in zijn ethische denkwijze moeten incorporeren. Die notie is echter niet vanzelfsprekend
deel van deze denkwijze, omdat hierin het menselijk vermogen om het goede te kennen en te doen voorop staat. Op de grote spanningen in deze redenering reflecteert Kant zelf niet. Toch moeten we aannemen dat hij weloverwogen te werk gaat.

In het licht van Ricœurs analyse van de symbolen van het kwaad hoeven deze spanningen ons niet te verbazen. Ze kunnen zelfs worden begrepen als veroorzaakt door de combinatie van ethische en tragische visies. Deze dubbelzinnigheid kan Kant in zijn redenering moeilijk een plaats geven. Dat komt niet alleen omdat hij in zijn reflexieve benadering streeft naar helderheid en ondubbelzinnigheid, maar vooral omdat hij wil vasthouden aan zijn ethische benadering. Hij is van mening dat het kwaad eerst en vooral moet worden beschouwd als iets dat mensen in vrijheid begaan en waarvoor ze dus volledig verantwoordelijk zijn. Opmerkelijk is in Kants tekst de relatie tussen religie en de thematiek van het kwaad. Deze relatie wordt door Kant niet afzonderlijk gethematiseerd: zijn interesse ligt bij het herstel van het goede. In het laatste hoofdstuk van dit boek zal dit aspect verder worden uitgewerkt.

In hoofdstuk 4 wordt vervolgens Jaspers’ visie geanalyseerd als representant van een tragiche benadering van het kwaad. Hij heeft echter juist waardering voor Kants leer van het radicale kwaad die wij als “ethisch” hebben gekarakteriseerd. Maar in zijn Kant-interpretatie blijkt meteen al dat Jaspers’ interesse uiteindelijk een heel andere is dan die van Kant. Hij ziet in Kants verhandeling over het radicale kwaad vooral verwoord dat het kwaad ondoorgrondelijk is. In het doordenken van het kwaad stuiten we op de grenzen van ons denken en worden we ons bewust van dat wat aan gene zijde van het denken ligt, het Umgreifende. In relatie tot dit Umgreifende of transcendentale kunnen wij onszelf worden, Existenz worden. Op deze manier geeft Jaspers een totale herformulering van Kants visie in existentiële termen. Het kwaad wordt behandeld als grenservaring, vergelijkbaar met de ervaringen van dood, lijden, strijd en schuld, waarin het mogelijk is het transcendentale of het Zijn zelf te ontdekken. Dit zijn momenten van Scheitern (mislukken, falen). Juist in die momenten van falen kan het Sein (Zijn) in het Dasein (bestaan) verschijnen omdat het Zijn zich “antinomisch” verhoudt tot het bestaan. Grenservingen zijn uitdrukkingen van de fundamentele antinomie van het menselijk bestaan.

Als filosoof kan Jaspers deze ervaring weliswaar aanduiden, maar hij kan er niet werkelijk inzicht in geven. De mens moet het Scheitern zelf ervaren en dat kan alleen als men juist met hartstocht zoekt naar waar-
heid in het denken en handelen. Het falen in de zoektocht naar het ware vindt Jaspers in de literaire vorm van de tragedie treffender verwoord dan in de filosofie. Wat Jaspers het “tragische weten” noemt, is eigenlijk een niet-weten dat juist in de literaire vorm adequaat kan worden uitgedrukt. De filosofie verstart gauw tot een weten wanneer ze deze antinomie van het bestaan probeert weer te geven. Hierin blijkt Jaspers’ fundamentele wantrouwen ten opzichte van filosofie als algemene, abstracte waarheid. Filosofie heeft alleen waarde wanneer men zich haar in de persoonlijke situatie eigen maakt. Dit geldt bij uitstek voor het centrale thema van Jaspers’ denken, het *Existenz*-worden in het *Scheitern*.

Op dit punt is er overeenkomst met Ricœur’s problematisering van speculatie over het kwaad. Toch wordt het probleem anders gemotiveerd. Voor Jaspers is het kwaad niet, zoals bij Ricœur, absurd, maar iets dat niet anders had kunnen zijn en dat niet anders zal zijn. Alleen zo is het verschijnen van het Zijn in het bestaan mogelijk. Doordat de tragische visie domineert, is Jaspers’ visie op het kwaad homogen dan die van Kant en is er voor dubbelzinnigheid geen plaats. De ethische betekenis van bijvoorbeeld het begrip “schuld” is bij Jaspers uiteindelijk ingebed in de overkoepelende tragische visie waarin het kwaad als onvermijdelijk deel van het menselijk bestaan verschijnt. Hierdoor komt de vraag op of het kwaad in deze visie wel een afzonderlijke categorie is. Het komt alleen ter sprake als deel van het algemene probleem van het menselijke bestaan. Het is de onthulling van de gebrokenheid van het bestaan. Dit betekent, dat het kwaad ook niet, zoals bij Ricœur, contrasteert met een oorspronkelijke goede staat. Anders gezegd: er is geen begin of einde aan het kwaad. Daardoor ontstaat een heel andere visie dan bij Ricœur. Het gebruik van de term “het kwaad” lijkt hier minder passend.

Tot slot wordt in hoofdstuk 4 aandacht besteed aan het geloof in het Zijn dat ten grondslag ligt aan Jaspers’ visie op het kwaad. Dit geloof wil Jaspers niet in speculatieve of metafysische termen vatten — een terughoudendheid die hij deelt met Kant. Terwijl bij Kant echter de doordringing van religie leidt tot een doorbreking van zijn strikt ethische redenering, is een dergelijke invloed niet zichtbaar bij Jaspers. Diens interpretatie van religie is meer in harmonie met zijn eigen existentiefilosofie en voert geen nieuw perspectief in zijn denken in.

Bij Karl Barth vinden we, in tegenstelling tot de andere auteurs, een voluit religieuze, respectievelijk theologische benadering van het kwaad. In hoofdstuk 5 wordt deze benadering geanalyseerd zonder direct relaties te leggen met de andere visies. Barth is gekozen, omdat hij afstand neemt
van de meest gebruikelijke formulering van het probleem van het kwaad in een religieuze context, de theodicee. Ook in mijn onderzoek heb ik er voor gekozen de theodicee-benadering niet centraal te stellen, omdat daarin het probleem van het kwaad bij voorbaat al op een specifieke manier wordt ingevuld, namelijk als het probleem van de onverenigbaarheid van Gods goedheid en almacht met het bestaan van het kwaad in Gods schepping. Barth wijst deze benadering af, omdat hij meent dat hierin de theologie teveel aansluiting zoekt bij de filosofie of de menselijke vragen, dat wil zeggen bij het denken “van buitenaf”. Hieruit blijkt al dat Barth zelf een uitgesproken opvatting heeft over hoe theologe te werk moet gaan: zij moet “van binnen uit” denken. Dit is een denken dat begint bij Gods openbaring aan de mens. Deze openbaring is een geschenk. De mens kan over dit geschenk niet beschikken; hij kan het niet op het spoor komen met gangbare ideeën, methoden en systemen van reflectie. Daarom noemt Barth de theologie een “gebroken” denkwijze. Zijn keuze van de term {\textit{das Nichtige}} als aanduiding voor wat gewoonlijk het kwaad wordt genoemd, sluit hierbij aan. Zo krijgt het voor ons onderzoek centrale probleem van het kennen van het kwaad bij Barth veel aandacht.


Dat leidt tot misvattingen die de macht van het {\textit{Nichtige}} versterken. Wij denken het {\textit{Nichtige}} bijvoorbeeld ten onrechte als identiek aan de negatieve aspecten van de schepping. Misvattingen blijken ook in het denken over zonde. De zonde wordt gemakkelijk voorgesteld als een vermogen, of juist als incident. Dat doet tekort aan het absurde karakter van de zonde.


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meer systematiek in zijn doordenking aan dan gerechtvaardigd lijkt op
grond van de kennis van het Nichtige uit de openbaring. Bovendien, en dat
is nog belangrijker, is er hierdoor nauwelijks plaats voor de realiteit van
het Nichtige als iets dat door mensen wordt ervaren. Dit maakt Barth's
theologische reflectie minder “gebroken”. Hij stelt zich meer op het
niveau van de geopenbaarde kennis van het Nichtige dan, gegeven de
macht van het Nichtige over ons menselijk denken, geoorloofd is. Daar-
door is het ook moeilijk te bepalen in welk opzicht de openbaring ons
menselijk denken over het Nichtige precies corrigeert. In vergelijking met
de andere auteurs die wij in dit onderzoek behandelen, blijkt dat Barth
het probleem van reflectie over het kwaad anders motiveert. Reflectie
can volgens hem moeilijk recht doen aan de ernst van het gevaar van
het Nichtige. Het gevaar van het Nichtige blijkt juist daarin, dat het
Gods vijand is met wie God strijdt en die door God wordt overwonnen.
Het Nichtige is geen menselijke vijand. Deze combinatie van de ernst van
de realiteit van het Nichtige, en de zekerheid van Gods overwinning van
het Nichtige lijkt typerend voor Barths religieuze visie op het kwaad.

Werd Barths benadering tot dusver geanalyseerd in het licht van zijn
eigen claims en criteria, in het zesde en laatste hoofdstuk wordt zij in
verbond gebracht met die van de andere auteurs. Uitgangspunt voor de
vergelijking is de notie van “het einde van het kwaad”. Deze notie is
ontleend aan Ricœurs werk. Hij brengt haar naar voren als kenmerkend
voor een religieuze visie op het kwaad. Dit idee lijkt aan te sluiten bij de
nadruk die we bij Barth vinden op de overwonnen status van het Nichtige.
Zo opent zich de mogelijkheid om de uitgesproken theologische visie van
Barth te vergelijken met filosofische benaderingen waarin respectievelijk
een ethische en een tragische visie dominant zijn. Met deze vergelijking
komt de toetsing van de hypothese dat het spreken over het kwaad het
meest thuis is in een religieuze context tot een afronding.

Volgens Ricœur is het voor een goed begrip van de symbolen van het
kwaad noodzakelijk om de symboliek van het einde van het kwaad in
aanmerking te nemen. Hieronder verstaat hij onder andere reiniging,
vergeving en boete, maar ook een eschatologisch einde van het kwaad. Eerst
wordt Ricœurse analyse van deze symbolen onderzocht teneinde daaruit
een aantal algemene kenmerken te destilleren. Zo wordt in het licht van
het einde van het kwaad pas goed duidelijk waarin het kwaad bestaat.
Ook geeft deze notie aan dat het kwaad niet zou moeten bestaan; ze
impliceert een oproep tot verzet en protest tegen het kwaad. In de sym-
bolen en mythen blijkt dat het einde van het kwaad niet een zaak van de
mens alleen is, maar ook, en zelfs in de eerste plaats, van God. De mens kan noch de goede orde, noch de overtreding daarvan volledig kennen. In de radicale verlossing van het kwaad door God blijkt daarnaast het radicale karakter van het kwaad. Dit einde van het kwaad is echter niet evenredig aan het kwaad zelf. Hier geldt de logica van de overvloedigheid, van het “hoeveel te meer”. Dit is een van de twee categorieën van de hoop die volgens Ricœur kenmerkend zijn voor een religieuze visie op het kwaad. De andere is de categorie van het “ondanks”: de hoop ondanks de huidige realiteit van het kwaad.

Ricœurs claim dat religie het kwaad retrospectief vanuit het einde ervan benadert, is gemakkelijk terug te herkennen in Barths leer van het Nichtig. Daarin staat de overwinning van het Nichtig in Christus centraal. Maar dit retrospectief verstaan heeft bij Barth nadrukkelijk een kritische implicatie, doordat hij het contrasteert met onze natuurlijke, menselijke opvattingen over het kwaad. Zijn religieuze visie wordt gekenmerkt door een fundamenteel wantrouwen jegens alle eigengereid menselijk denken over het kwaad. Dit wantrouwen gaat uiteindelijk terug op een specifiek beeld van de mens als ten zeerste verbonden met het kwaad. Daardoor kan de mens het kwaad niet uit zichzelf doorgroden, laat staat er een einde aan maken. Uit zichzelf stelt de mens het kwaad als ongevaarlijker voor dan het is. Zo rechtvaardigt hij zichzelf. Onthult Barth hiermee een centraal kenmerk van de religieuze benadering van het kwaad? Deze suggestie lijkt te worden bevestigd door de opvatting van Ricœur over het verschil tussen een ethische en een religieuze benadering van schuld. De religieuze benadering, meent Ricœur, onderkent de zonde van zelfrechtvaardiging. Deze zonde komt aan het licht in het perspectief van het einde van het kwaad. Het is opmerkelijk dat Ricœur de religieuze benadering illustreert met een verwijzing naar Kants begrip van het radicale kwaad. Dat zou betekenen dat de visie die ik als “ethisch” heb karakteriseerd toch een fundamenteel aspect van een religieuze visie op het kwaad zou verwoorden. In de derde paragraaf van hoofdstuk 6 wordt deze suggestie onderzocht.

Volgens Ricœur heeft Kant oog voor het kwaad van de zelfrechtvaardiging, omdat hij naar de mens kijkt met de blik van de hoop. Kant is zich bewust van het verlangen naar vervulling dat ons denken en willen kenmerkt, maar dat nooit hier en nu vervuld kan worden. Kwaad is de persversie van de hoop op vervulling: dat wat nog vervuld moet worden, wordt als nu reeds vervuld gedacht. Concludeert Ricœur terecht dat Kant hiermee het kwaad op het spoor is dat onthuld wordt in het licht van religieuze hoop? Een vergelijking met Barths visie toont dat de aard van de
hoop, en de redenen waarom die hoop nog niet als vervuld kan worden gezien, bij Kant anders zijn dan bij Barth. De intrinsieke relatie die bij Barth aanwezig is tussen het perspectief van hoop en de notie van het kwaad vinden we niet bij Kant. Ook is de hoop bij Kant volledig moreel gemotiveerd; zijn uitgangspunt is niet het idee van het einde van het kwaad door God. Daardoor is er geen plaats voor de radicale kritiek van de menselijke doordenking van het kwaad die we in de religieuze context vonden. Om na te gaan of we die elementen als kenmerkend voor een religieuze visie kunnen aanwijzen, wenden we ons tot slot nogmaals tot Jaspers’ visie.

Jaspers legt veel nadruk op het gevaar van reflectie op het kwaad, maar fundeert dat niet in het onderscheid tussen menselijke kennis en kennis uit Gods openbaring. Zijn kritische houding ten opzichte van eerste, intuïtieve duidingen van het kwaad is gemotiveerd door zijn visie op filosofie als duiding van de aanvankelijke zinloosheid van ellende. Door die duiding is het mogelijk ervaringen van falen te zien als momenten waarin het Zijn zelf kan worden ervaren en de mens Existenz kan worden. In zijn doordenking van het tragische weten noemt Jaspers deze zelfwording “verlossing”. Hij benadrukt echter dat dit een verlossing in het tragische moet zijn en geen verlossing van het tragische, zoals die bijvoorbeeld in christelijke tragedies te vinden is. Zijn zorg lijkt te zijn, dat in het tweede geval de spanning tussen het bestaan (Dasein) en het Zijn niet wordt volgehouden, terwijl dit de enige manier is om het Zijn in het bestaan te ervaren. Vergelijkbare bezwaren zijn te maken bij Barths nadruk op het overwonnen karakter van het kwaad. Ook lijkt bij Barths visie het gevaar niet denkbeeldig dat zij mensen onvoldoende aanzet tot strijd tegen het kwaad. Tegelijkertijd is het de vraag of Jaspers’ eigen visie daar wel voldoende toe aanzet. Zijn kritische visie op doordenking van het kwaad is niet gefundeerd in een vergelijkbaar kritische visie op de mens in het algemeen. En biedt zijn idee van het transcendente voldoende tegenwicht aan de zinloosheid ervaring om een duiding tot stand te brengen die de spanning tussen het Zijn en het bestaan intact laat?

Ook in de analyse van Jaspers’ denken blijkt het verhelderend de notie van het einde van het kwaad in het spel te brengen. Door aan deze notie afzonderlijk aandacht te schenken zijn de verschillen tussen spreken over het kwaad in een religieuze, en in een ethische of tragische context nog duidelijker geworden. De vergelijking aan de hand van de notie van het einde van het kwaad toont ook dat een religieuze visie het gevaar loopt onvoldoende aan te zetten tot strijd tegen het kwaad, dan wel het einde van het kwaad als reeds volledig gerealiseerd te zien. Deze gevaren
zijn echter de keerzijde van de kritische beschouwing van het kwaad die voortkomt uit de voorstelling dat God het kwaad beëindigt. We zagen dat juist in het licht van dit einde het kwaad wordt afgebakend als iets dat er niet zou moeten zijn en waartegen de mens zich moet verzetten. Anderzijds impliceert deze beëindiging door God een radicale kritiek van de menselijke vermogens het kwaad te doorgronden of te controleren. Deze kritische beschouwing van het kwaad kan tegenwicht bieden aan de zojuist genoemde gevaren ervan. De vergelijking met ethische en tragische visies heeft zo de eigen aard en status van het kwaad in een religieuze context verhelderd. Ook is duidelijk geworden dat de notie van het kwaad in deze context een bredere betekenis krijgt dan in de eenzijdiger ethische en tragische visies. In een religieuze context lijkt de notie van het kwaad daarom bij uitstek thuis te zijn. Het is de taak van de godsdienstfilosofie om deze context zo te verhelderen dat betekenissen van het kwaad die verloren dreigen te gaan in onze huidige visie op mens en wereld opnieuw aan het licht kunnen komen.
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