

Text 21. Philosophizing about evil

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21.1. Evil: a problem

Naturally, an innumerable amount has been written about “evil,” but we limit ourselves to one text from which we depart to develop our own thesis, namely *G. Maertens, *God en het lijden** , in: **Collationes **, (Ghent) 1973: 4 (Dec.), 359 / 481.

Suffering.

“Dissatisfaction, discontent, pain experienced as a better imperfection. Suffering is undergoing: one can call it the passive side of the mystery of evil.” (Acts 459). In other words: Suffering arises as a result of evil. It can all be summarized in a conceptual framework: “If evil is the reality to be undergone (the given), then suffering is the response to it.” In a common formula: “stimulus) response.”

Angry.

Maertens, ac , 475 cites G. Leibniz (1646/1716) who devised a metaphysical theodicy. ' Theo-dicee ' means 'accountability' (-dicee) of God (Theo-) regarding evil in creation and, at the same time, suffering as its transmission.

According to Leibniz, God is “pure perfection” (pure act, in his still medieval language regarding the matter). As a person—he reasons strictly monotheistically—he is omnipotent, i.e., he creates a world, an all-good, i.e., he creates a good world. According to Leibniz, what he calls “the world” is “the best possible in potential”: “if the world could not have been the best of all possible worlds, then God would not have created one at all.” That is called Leibniz’s optimism.

21.1.1. Metaphysical, physical and moral aspect of evil.

Leibniz, as a metaphysician, encounters as a condition of possibility of physical and moral evil in creation, which he establishes as an evident fact, despite his optimism: the finitude of all that has been created by the all-good and all-powerful God.

Definition of evil.

To properly understand that metaphysical condition—finitude—we must first clearly define the evil that causes suffering (it concerns a closely causal process).

21.1.2. The normal and the anomalous course of finite realities .

Maertens cites, ac , 469, Albert Camus (1913/1960), who is counted among the existential thinkers, in his philosophical novel *La peste* (1947), in his essays *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (1941), *l' Homme révolté* (1951).

Doctor Rieux , the central figure in **La Peste **, is, along with Paneloux , a Jesuit, a witness to the impressive death struggle of an innocent child. The evil in the course of an innocent person's life is, emotionally at least, a high point in existential philosophy, which places considerable emphasis on the mind (to the detriment of modern reason or even the Christian faith).

The child in question had a normal course of life up until death. The cause of death is the evil that causes that normal course to deviate, at first glance, as a coincidence. Let us put it this way: “If a course undergoes a coincidence as a deviation, and that deviation is experienced as the cause of suffering, then there is a question of an evil coincidence, i.e., of evil.”

Chance.

The definition of chance, that of that which is unforeseen and immediately unpredictable from a limited—finite (to use Leibniz's words)—perspective at least, is a necessary condition of the definition of evil. We explain.

Physical evil.

Suppose an acorn falls from the tree in October. In the grass, it waits until the following spring to germinate and thus eventually become an oak. That is the normal biological-scientific course of events, and thus the course prescribed in the very essence. Coincidence, however, arises from the fact that, as a finite being, the acorn is not alone in the world.

(1). A lady passes in the grass and her weight somewhat crushes the acorn. In the spring it shoots up but grows crookedly . The physical weight of the lady is a physical harm to the acorn and its process or course of development.

(2) . Even worse: a squirrel - hungry - simply eats up the acorn. There is not even a start to the growth process. If we consider being eaten by an animal to be physical evil only in the sense that the squirrel is part of the physical-biological world. 'Physical' means “that which shows no moral responsibility”, but is a natural process.

Compare that to the child in La Peste .

A death-causing factor causes the child's normal course of life to deviate, indeed, simply interrupts it. With the pain for the child resulting from that abnormal and therefore unpredictable, accidental course—let us say, alien course.

Moral evil.

Let us compare this with a boy who is constantly bullied by a group at school. The normal course of a boy's life at school—which is, in essence, a naturally prescribed course of necessity—is that he completes his learning process within a group of friends. Being bullied, however, is an accident, and indeed a pain-inducing accident, as a deviation from the normal course: it is evil, and this time moral evil, because the cause of the bullying lies in a being endowed with insight and conscience: the schoolmate.

Gifted with insight and feeling

What do we say: “endowed with insight and feeling”. That would be the normal behavior of the comrades, yet they deviate: the evil that lies in that deviation causes the evil contained in the bullying of our schoolboy.

Our schoolboy is not alone—finite as he is—he situates himself within the rest of the world and suffers its evil—an accident that neither his parents nor he had desired or expected in the form of bullying. The disappointment that this accident brings proves that evil is involved, a deviation from the normal such that disappointment arises.—Behold a definition of evil: an alien deviation from the normal course.

Metaphysical.

It is evident: because all that is finite does not itself decide alone on the normal course prescribed in its essence, but together with the rest of the world that must realize that course, we have the metaphysical conditions of possibility of physical and moral evil. Leibniz is therefore right on a logical level: finitude entails dependence, i.e., influence from the outside, occurring as the disruption of a normal course.

Note - It is evident that our explanation prioritizes a steering-oriented explanation, A. - B. - CA is the normal course, goal-oriented; B is the accidental course deviating from the goal; C is, if the capability exists, the restoration of the normal goal-oriented course.

Cybernetics since 1950 has mathematized the ancient control scheme but has not invented it. The earliest Greek thinkers in antiquity were already very familiar with this scheme.

Whereby the presupposition held pre-eminently that essence—normal, that is, not thwarted by the rest—determines the entire course. That metaphysical concept of 'essence' is the presupposition: if things had no essence, how would they proceed?

21.1.3. Voltaire and the problem of evil.

As Maertens briefly summarizes: from the ancient Greek Epicurus of Samos (Epicurus (-341/-270) to Albert Camus, a pseudo-dilemma is prevalent that also applies to Voltaire (1694 / 1778) upholds: either God cannot prevent evil, which proves that he is not omnipotent as Leibniz claims, or he does not wish to prevent it, which proves that he is not all good in Leibniz 's sense.

Criticism.

This dilemma conceals a very decisive metaphysical fact, namely the relative autonomy of the created. Which causes the dilemma to turn into its opposite:

Either God respects the relative autonomy of creation, both physically and especially morally (the latter encompassing the free creature's own, irreducible responsibility), which implies that he is indeed primordial but not simply omnipotent,

Either God does not respect the relative autonomy of creation (especially that of the creature susceptible to morality), which entails that he tolerates no autonomy alongside him, which entails that he exercises a puppet show control over the universe, in which the radical distinction between him and that created for him is not given its due—which would be a caricatural God.

In other words:

God, to the extent that he respects the relative autonomy of creation—including deviations from the normal course—cannot possibly prevent the evil at work in those deviations, but that does not imply that he is not primordial , the pure responsible power and pre-eminence of all other created power.

God, to the extent that He respects the relative autonomy of creation, as stated just now, by no means wishes to prevent all evil, but that does not prevent Him from being good, provided He is good with respect for the autonomy of creation.

In summary: Epicurean reasoning stands or falls in its dilemma with the radical exclusion of the autonomy of creation. It testifies to an inability , among atheists and critics of God's plan of the world, to conceive of a God who

tolerates and understands a sometimes irritating dose of autonomy (inherent or essential lawfulness) alongside Himself.

21.1.4. “When people are deeply wounded, reasoning doesn't help much”

(ac , 474). Maertens pits—what he calls—a speculative interpretation, understand: a logical-metaphysical interpretation—against—what he calls an existential meaning-making. In this sense, he says: “Making suffering (speculatively) understandable usually does not solve the problem of existential meaning in any part. And that is what it is all about, after all.” (ibid).

An example.

A woman who loses her young husband in a disaster—parents who know that their sweet little one will not survive—can do rather little with the statement that they must view this from a universal (*note*: situated in a broader context) perspective.” (ac , 476). Ac , 477: “Until one is perhaps confronted with a painful borderline case in one’s own life. Then one asks for more than just insight.”

Emotionalism . - Maertens states that “all those arguments” from some theodicy or other (ac , 376) do not touch upon human existence. We correct: “do not touch upon human existence in a very emotional phase”. All the arguments he cites against 'speculative' meaning-making stand or fall with the emotional aspect of human existence.

It is true, very true: immediately after enduring a very painful disappointment, man usually loses his inner peace and his rationality regarding all other moments of life. When the physician Rieux and the monk Paneloux witness “the terrible death struggle of an innocent child” up close, with full involvement, metaphysical and other interpretations of meaning are usually misplaced. Why? Because in these hyper-emotional (called 'existential') monuments, the person involved wishes to relive the experience to the very core until the emotional shock and wound subside and inner peace is regained.

But every ordinary person with an essentially minimal experience of evil and the suffering and pain caused by it knows that this very strong phase, which shakes one out of ordinary equilibrium, does not last and is not 'processed'. But then the logical-metaphysical finding of meaning does present itself, and the moment of reflection and 'reasoning' has arrived.

No matter how intense the emotion, it overtakes the search for meaning. From the world of sorrow, one returns to the ordinary world of everyday life.

21.1.5. Bad mood.

It happens that, instead of becoming open to reason, people are left with a wound called bitterness as a result of shocking evil and suffering. The daily form of this is called “bad temper”. Not without reason did the ancient Romans call that state of mind —actually that designation of what goes wrong and disappoints—“ iniqua mens”, unjust state of mind .

Just try it: someone in a bad mood resembles someone who begins to process a profound anger, but without any profound anger being the direct cause. Such a person listens, but he represses or suppresses within himself the pure—rational—insight that he is wrong with his emotionality. He no longer believes, no longer hopes, and is loveless. Until—for sometimes unfathomable reasons—he thaws and becomes receptive to reason and fellow human beings once again.

The embittered

The embittered person—like Camus’s **l’homme révolté**—is essentially ill-tempered to a severe degree—a mood that threatens to distort all facts into a caricature of it. Anyone who lives day in and day out with such an embittered person knows that the description above is painfully accurate: humanity—in Biblical language, but for that reason not “outdated”—charity is lost. To such an extent, in fact, that the embittered person becomes a 'saw' to those around him and gradually becomes isolated, unless he—the term is the right one—repents.

This is how one understands (but critically) Camus's thesis: revolting is setting the principle of “justice” that lives within man against that of “injustice” that is built into the world. “People must enforce this justice ‘against God’ by their own strength” (ac , 469/480). This is how the embittered person reasons, who settles into bitterness and confuses facts such as God with its caricature.

For Camus, “justice” is not “the justice” of a deep inner peace which, as William James (1842/1910) explains in his ** The Varieties of Religious Experience **, situates evil and the suffering associated with it in an sphere of “the sublime,” and thus calmly and in time overcomes every bad mood and

bitterness. And “makes one open to reason.” Not allowing irresponsible emotionality to exert a further disturbing influence.

21.2. How to interpret evil (1) ?

21.2.1. The ultimate interpretation of evil and suffering.

Maertens, ac , 462, sees three major postures:

1. To try to escape from it,
2. fighting and
3. notwithstanding everything, to try to give meaning to it. This third attitude—he says—becomes a great challenge as the two preceding ones fail. We situate this threefold nature within a general schema.

ABC theory. Ellis and Sagarin , two American psychologists, have developed a cognitive theory that we briefly outline here as their form of hermeneutics (theory of interpretation).

A. is the fact that is disappointing; **B.** is the mentality (expressed in axiomatic sentences) with which the person who has to deal with the miscalculation interprets A, the fact. **C.** is the final attitude that processes the setback. It can be summarized in a logical formula:

If A and B, then C is logically understandable.

Sagarin, it is evident that the behaviorists' overly simplistic twofold interpretation scheme is supplemented by what takes place in the mind of the interpreter in response to a disappointing stimulus.

Application.

We can now situate Maertens' tripartite nature within that ABC scheme: “If A. (setback, bad), and B (trying to escape it/seeking meaning in what has been worked on), then C. (three-part behavioral type) is understandable”.

Meaning

Maertens employs the term 'meaning', but a definition is necessary if we wish to proceed logically. Assuming that 'meaning' coincides with what we previously called “the normal course,” then human life becomes understandable: bringing a baby into the world entails an expectation on the part of the parents, namely that the life of that child will follow its normal course. That is the normal meaning of that life.

One sees the problem: if that normal course, which is the original meaning of the baby's life, is compromised by a deviation, then the problem of adapted interpretation arises: one must, willy-nilly, give some meaning to that deviation.

With this we arrive at Maertens's threefold nature: one can respond to a miscalculation in more than one way. That is the typical ambiguity of things and of miscalculations. In terms of ABC theory: one can respond to the same A differently (C) for reasons of B.

21.2.2. Further philosophy of evil.

Once we arrive at the question of the 'meaning' of an evil—an evil that, viewed solely from the normal course of events, is a coincidence, an unforeseen and unnatural event that is painful—the question arises whether that coincidence is really as coincidental as it seems.

The acorn.

When one considers only the normal course of an acorn's life, the fact that it is crushed by a lady's foot or gobbled up by a squirrel is unnatural, alien to the nature of the being. The logical consequence is that it is impossible to deduce from the acorn as a given alone that it will be crushed or eaten. That is unpredictable. Furthermore: in a text about the oak and the acorn, purely scientifically, only the normal course of events occurs.

The finitude of the acorn.

Finite, limited. The acorn does not exist in the world alone: it exists together with the rest. This implies that the rest may occasionally disrupt its normal course. But then what we call 'chance' changes into a natural or inherent process, yet one of a composite nature. If one knew both the course of the acorn and the course of the lady or the squirrel, then being trampled or being eaten would not be a chance but something inevitable, even though we cannot practically predict it. Unpredictability (cognitive) is not yet a denial of necessity (objective).

A comparison.

When the Titanic departed from Southampton for New York in 1913, no one could have predicted that the ship would sink. But anyone who had known from the outset both the course of the Titanic and the trajectory from the North of the iceberg upon which it struck would have predicted the collisions with certainty as an objective necessity. Even though there is

cognitively complete surprise and thus 'coincidence'. That coincidence is merely coincidence for those who observe the ship's trajectory unilaterally without situating it as a finite given within the rest of reality. For those who adopt more than this one-sided and limited, finite, perspective, there is a question of necessity.

The logical axiom of (sufficient / necessary) reason or ground. – One may be familiar with Plato's statement: “Nothing is without reason”. And Hegel systematically sought the essential reason for existence of established facts and phenomena.

Note this: Platon's axiom can also be understood as follows, namely: “All that is nothing is all that is without reason.” In other words: if something, in pure fiction, were to be thought without any reason, then it is absolutely nothing. In other words: all that is 'being', that reality (in the sense of non-nothing or 'something'), has a sufficient reason or ground, either within itself (entirely certain) or outside itself. It is the sufficient reason that makes something what it is and that it exists.

Chance.

Actually, 'chance' in the strict sense is that which has no sufficient or necessary reason. In other words: in that sense, it is nothing. – This means that nothing is chance in the actual, absolute sense. True chance only exists when one considers something in its course without taking the rest into account, but that is relative chance, that is, chance insofar as something is considered without the rest of reality – without its framework in which it is situated. Absolute chance does not exist.

21.2.3. Hegel's 'deduction' -

He was once reproached by a certain Herr Krug in 1804 - is to be understood as follows.

a. Krug imagined that Hegel meant by his 'deduction': deriving existence and the mode of being—e.g. of dogs and cats, of his pen holder—from abstract presuppositions.

b. No; thus Hegel,—dogs and cats, my pen holder is not derived from abstractions—just as a theorem in geometry is deducible (and immediately provable) with all that precedes it,—those things are established as factual givens.

To 'deduce' them means to presuppose the conditions of possibility of those factual data that express the reason for existence and the manner of being, and from those presuppositions make the established facts understandable and logically justifiable. Such a deduction amounts to an explanation: "If the reason for existence and the manner of being, then the established facts are understandable and logically deducible." That is Hegel's axiom of sufficient reason or ground. But there is more.

Totality/ movement/ conflict/ reconciliation.

To 'deduce' (logically fathom) an established fact, one must ultimately—mind you: ultimately—situate it within the totality of reality. This is 'movement', this course of events. Such a course of events may eventually run into conflict with the rest.

Such a conflict eventually finds a solution (reconciliation). This is how one sees the explanatory framework that is Hegelian dialectics. It is a re-foundation of Platonic dialectics.

Application.

Let us now apply this to "the terrible death struggle of an innocent child" of which Doctor Rieux and the monk Paneloux are the immediate witnesses, but only after the intense emotional phase has passed and both – at least in principle – are open to reason.

Hegel would that fact:

1. situate in the totality of reality, i.e., in the all-encompassing framework of all that ever was, now is, and ever will be.
2. He would view that fact as a progression – in his language, 'movement'.
3. He would view the child's life as a progression in conflict with what disrupts that progression (the deviation).
4. And, if within these finite (and thus presupposing the rest of reality) possibilities of our mind (intellect, reason, emotion, will are finite) – a solution – 'reconciliation' of the conflict – is to be found, Hegel would pursue it.

Admittedly, it seems abstract, but it is 'real', that is, it is true to reality.

Rationality.

Platon and Hegel—along with many others, for that matter—stand for the rationality of all that exists—Hegelian: of all that ever was, exists now, and ever will be. How to understand such a thing?

They state that everything that is, has a reason, within itself / outside itself. Now, in Latin, 'ratio' is the word for 'reason'. One can put it this way: "Everything that exists has its 'ratio' and is therefore rational". That has nothing to do with rationalism detached from life: if Rieux and Paneloux are deeply annoyed regarding the course (the 'movement') of the child, then it is thoroughly because they find no sufficient reason for it.

Also: Camus is logical through and through. He calls the fact 'absurd', that which shows no reason yet causes excruciating pain. He presupposes the absurdism of the deeply irritated Camus, far from refuting the rationality of reality.

We repeat: they seek reason, do not find it (for the time being), and call the situation absurd, irrational. – The term 'justice', insofar as it lives within man, is precisely the absolute demand to find a sensible explanation – which they find nowhere.

That is called "the injustice built into the world" (ac , 369/370). Indeed, the injustice done to the child is built into his course, his life's journey. But whether it is an absolute injustice (as absurdism claims) is nowhere strictly proven. It is at most a relative injustice that, according to Hegel's concept of 'reconciliation', will somewhere—however—find a justice, however difficult it may be to find. There is relative absurdity , not absolute. Let one not confuse the two.

The application again

We applied the basic Hegelian schema to Camus' description of the death throes of an innocent child. Now, one should note that such a schema is in fact a configuration of commonplaces, which must be filled in with singularly concrete data. Otherwise, one falls into an interpretation that is the same for all cases.

1. Singular.

Hegel knows very well—with the Romanticism of his time, which restored the singular to its rightful place against the abstractionism of the rationalists of his time—that life is the central category of Romanticism, that it is singular time and again, unique, one-of-a-kind, even if the singular is the singular form of the general concept. In this case : Camus's innocent child is, in its uniqueness, irreducible to all other realities, children included. In that sense, a commonplace falls short, and filling that empty shell with individual details is necessary if one is not to "fall into generalities" and "empty rhetoric."

2. Specifically.

' Concretus ' in Latin means “that which is fused with the rest”. That rest, too, is singular and covers circumstances that are beings connected to the singular in some way. In this case : the innocent child in Camus's novel, for example, had parents who had given it a biological nature that partly determines its life course and perhaps entailed built-in miscalculations. And so on. Hegel's emphasis on the concrete is typically Romantic.

Conclusion:

The basic Hegelian scheme, as a configuration of commonplaces—that is, aspects of a totality that recur again and again and have universal value—is heuristic, as it sets the searching, rational mind on the path to finding singular and concrete data.

Incidentally.

The four causes are known, in fact: reasons or explanatory grounds of Aristotle:

1. The material aspect (e.g. a sick body),
2. The formal aspect (e.g. the soul as forma, essential structure, of the body which, for example, exhibits a neurosis).
3. The causal aspect (the cause or at least a set of factors that determine the origin and course of the material and formal aspects).
4. The exemplary or ideal aspect (a remnant of Platonism) (every reality, material, formal, causal, is inconceivable without its ideal form). - Aristotle thereby created a heuristic schema of commonplaces that, like empty shells, await singular-concrete fillings.

So much for the general pedestal

upon which the second part of our philosophy of evil and suffering rests. The section that follows is a series of conventional interpretations with singular, or at least particular and concrete, interpretations.

21.2.4. Objectifying Suffering According to the Buddha.

Ac , 462/464 is a brief outline of the way Buddhists interpret evil, the cause of suffering. “Suffering can be reduced to and coincides with the continuous effort of man to bring his desires to realization.”

It is human desire that gives things their 'reality' and also produces suffering . (ac , 462v.).

Put differently: man is thrown into this world by conception and birth, and with desires, and in the midst of a situation. The course into which the self is thrown is a necessity. Buddha reasons purely psychologically : the psyche creates what he calls “reality,” in fact: the desirability of the things with which he has to live. Therefore, apply yoga techniques, for example, so that this desirability of things, especially those that disappoint, is reinterpreted as an illusion , and the suffering caused by miscalculations will be alleviated, if not eliminated entirely.

Whether the causes of that suffering disappear thereby is highly questionable. One can also attempt to reinterpret those causes as an illusion. Whether that succeeds with the psychic techniques of Buddhism is likewise to be confirmed with great reservation. As Maertens says: technology, medicine, the creation of wealth, and everything humanity undertakes to remove the causes of suffering, of evil, seem highly second-rate.

Our world

Our world—with its course—should preferably come into being exclusively on the basis of “purely mental, inner acts” (ac , 463). The traditional magician practices such a thing. But he does so, admittedly on the basis of mental acts (they are the soul of every true magic), but on the basis of psychic acts that change the circumstances, not turning the world into an illusion, but changing that world itself in its course.

But that a Buddhist mentalism has succeeded in mentally neutralizing the same world by turning away from it, and thus reducing inner suffering, seems quite possible.

What Maertens does seem to underestimate is the *typically Eastern mysticism* that constitutes *the main goal* of Buddhism and through which it situates itself—apart from a few sometimes fundamental differences (e.g. regarding belief in a Supreme Being or ordinary deities)—with a very significant mystical component .

Incidentally :

Whoever wants to know more about this should read, for example, *MM Davy, director, Encyclopédie des mystiques. orientales* , Paris, 1975 (on *La mystique du boeddhisme Indien* (oc 111/ 140), *Le mysticisme Tibétain* (oc, 141/167), *La mystique du boeddhisme Japonais* (oc, 289/309), or also, but

less in-depth *Bruno Borchert* , *Mystiek (Hetverschijnselen, de geschiedenis, de nieuwe uitdaging)* , Haarlem, 1989-1, 1994-2.

Buddha's psychologism regarding suffering and its causes acquires, from the mystical level of mastery of processes and the course of one's own life, a foundation unsuspected by most Western people.

21.2.5. The flight attitude of hedonism.

Aristippus of Curaçao (fifth century BC), a pupil of Socrates and founder of the Curaçaoan school, held that the 'virtue' ('aretè', i.e., virtue) of man consisted fundamentally in pursuing sensual pleasure governed by reason. For him, sensual pleasure was reduced rather to the instantaneous pleasure that one would wish to make last.

Epicurus of Samos (-341/-270), the father of the pleasure-seeking garden, sought inner peace and, more than Aristippus, was aware of the unpleasant consequences of a life of pleasures. Epicureanism has become a long, enduring tradition.

If suffering is unavoidable, try to experience as many pleasures as possible so that the positive balance—in this case, the pleasurable course of existence on this earth—outweighs as much as possible.

Maerten's thesis: "Pleasure remains a very peripheral (*note*: situated on the outside of the course of life) definition of happiness" (ac, 465), seems very correct to us. But as a representation of the actual existence of many people, hedonism is very correct, especially in our affluent societies.

It can lead to selfishness, but not necessarily: there are hedonistic people who find their 'pleasure' in making others 'pleasant' from all kinds of perspectives. Although most often label "the others," those who are not like-minded, as "to be avoided" in order to... escape misery. Are we not all at least a little like that? Which does not automatically make it blatant selfishness, of course. In other words: a justifiable dose of hedonism is conceivable.

Yet it is clear that whoever, fleeing from the unpleasantness connected with all factual life—it is built-in—in the long run makes pleasures the main purpose of life, shrivels into a being alien to one's fellow man.

21.3. How to interpret evil (2) ?

21.3.1. Psychedelic expansions of consciousness as a flight attitude .

Psychedelism is the state of the soul under the actual influence of hallucinogenic substances. One need only think of the notorious LSD Lysergic acid diethylamide (also called lysergamide , or lysergide). 'Psychedelic' (psuchè , soul and dêlos , making visible –)—common since the sixties with the beatniks (1955) and the hippies (1962)—is that substance which 'expands' the human faculties of perception and sensation such that one becomes aware of a state that the drug-free consciousness does not know, or rarely knows. One's own body, things in the outside world, the sense of self: they all change, and this in the form of a “blissful experience” until the biochemical effect leaves it 'extinguished'.

The drug cala

According to Martens, the range of drugs has expanded to such an extent due to evolving biochemistry that, within a burnt-out layer—particularly among alternative youth—it gives rise to a cultural movement that utilizes it to “cope” with what goes wrong in daily life—from work fatigue to depressive and related states of mind . The major side effect, however, is addiction: one wants to recreate the 'best' state time and again at the expense of the rest of one's pastimes.

Cultural criticism

Cultural criticism is perhaps one of the most urgent underlying causes of the increasing drug use: “the unease in culture” (one thinks of S. Freud's book and Franz Kafka's works) is undeniable and is a new evil that makes itself felt. Or rather: an evil, apparently built into modern and postmodern culture, leads to a 'Weltschmerz', a deep suffering caused by our world.

Yet it is clear that biochemical—partially known since primitive cultures within which they were often used in a sacred and magical way—work psychologically rather than addressing the cause, the evil active in our culture, and that their effectiveness in that sense is rather ineffective. Moreover: for our current societies, drug use has become one of the great cultural scourges.

21.3.2. Suicide as an escape posture

Maertens, ai, 467, again cites Albert Camus: “ *Albert Camus* was actually not wrong when he began his philosophical essay * *Le mythe de Sisyphe** (1942) with the text: “ Il n' ya qu ' un alone problem Philosophical : suicide . The question of whether life is worthwhile or not is the core philosophical question. Yet Camus rejected suicide and opted for 'engagement', commitment, active involvement, one of the main existential themes.

Luc Debraine , L'OMS établit pour la première fois une carte mondiale de la santé mentale , in: Le Temps (Geneva) 10.10.01, 41, refers to the World Health Organization report published in 2001. It states the following.

a. One in four of the world's population suffers from “mental disorders”. Almost two-thirds of them do not seek treatment.

Depression is on the rise and – according to forecasts – will become the second most common ailment after heart disease in 2020.

The WHO list includes depression, schizophrenia, mental retardation, childhood and adolescent disorders, addiction (drugs, alcohol), Alzheimer's disease, and epilepsy.

These ailments are called 'universal': all countries, societies, and individuals can contract them.

b. The World Health Organization also states that one million people commit suicide every year and that about ten million make suicide attempts.

Curious: the report states that the mental state is physical as well as genetic, social, or ecological.

The causes of suicide are quite varied, yet the prevailing opinion is that “most suicides stem from an 'irrational' feeling of powerlessness in the face of overwhelming suffering” (Maertens, ac , 467).

Let us note in this regard that most suicides and attempts occur in the acute emotional phase—briefly described above—in which one is momentarily not (yet) receptive to reason.

This is abundantly clear: the ten million who dare to do so do not commit suicide afterwards, once recovered from some emotional shock or other: they reconciled themselves with an existence in which evil is built.

21.3.3. The revolt as a defensive attitude.

Maertens, ac , 468/470 clearly distinguishes this interpretation from the flight postures.

Albert Camus , in **The Myth of Sisyphus** (1943), states that “everything is utterly irrational” and thereby meaningless, absurd. Yet not the flight from life into which we are thrown with our inner 'justice'—meaning: the demand that reality be meaningful—but freedom, that is, consciously breaking free from the suffocating-subjugating pressure—like pack ice—of the 'unjust' world, and revolt, that is, living in constant rebellion against absurdity .

Only in this way can man attempt to organize his existence in a meaningful manner. One must lucidly — *note*: fully realizing what is at stake—install oneself in the absurd, continuously and senselessly dragging boulders upwards “et imaginer Sisyphus happy ” (ac , 468). And imagine that Sisyphos , notwithstanding the futility of his efforts, is 'happy'. Or – so we correct Camus – feels happy.

Incidentally:

Sisyphus is the mythical king of Corinth , notorious for his crimes. As a great criminal, ancient Greek myth condemns him to push a boulder up a mountainside in the underworld—hell. Yet time and again, the boulder fell back down just as he was about to reach the mountaintop.

In the light of such a myth, Camus attempted to construct “a positive humanism”.

Maertens. - To my knowledge, Camus is the author who best conveys the human sense of life which, faced with suffering, must take a stand without a god, whom he, moreover, rejects.” (ac , 468). Camus expresses this literarily in the figure of the physician Rieux , who wishes to live as “a saint without God.”

Paneloux , the Jesuit, on the other hand, is portrayed by Camus as a 'believer' who “accepts everything”. He dies in that “active fatalism”.

If Camus intended to depict the Christian processing of the absurd in that figure, then he confuses one type of belief in God with other forms of it that

are more than and different from “active fatalism”. Jesus taught anything but “active fatalism”.

21.3.4. The Marxist interpretation of evil as a defensive attitude.

While Camus neglects the evil within the individual himself, which he seems to define as 'justice', Marxism wholeheartedly acknowledges the evil in humanity but reduces it to the evil called “capitalist exploitation”.

Consequence: change that distorted capitalist base of society, and the entire superstructure (the entire culture) will immediately change for the better.

Just as with the atheist Camus, religion in Marxism—understood specifically as belief in God—is an inadequate solution. Religion is the opium of the people; it diverts consciousness from the capitalist exploitation of the proletariat in order to pin it down in the numbed state of belief in God and the expectation of true salvation in an afterlife.

Marxist socialism thus also sees in religion and everything associated with it an 'Entfremdung', a consciousness alienated from itself and from the world in its course, which must be actively eradicated.

The collapse of the communist regimes in the 1990s exposed the fact that this extermination has become a bloody and deadly practice for many believers.

Martens admits that actual Christendom and the official churches were often the “opium of the people” and that Marxist criticism contains truth.

However, he counters this by stating that Christianity does not necessarily degenerate into the opium of the people.

But above all, he emphasizes that forms of evil and Entfremdung, unreal consciousness, exist that can be found outside of capitalist exploitation; guilty moral behavior, illness, and death are therefore not abolished by a communist planetary utopia and demonstrate their finitude very clearly.

He mentions Marxist intellectuals such as Machovec (Czechoslovakia), Geraideg (France), and Solzhenitsyn (USSR), who openly admit that they do

not know “how the problem of the deathbed can be solved in a Marxist way” (ac , 471).

But despite all socialization, people keep getting sick and dying.

21.3.5. Christian charity as a defense against evil.

“It is impossible to even mention here what Christian charity has accomplished over the centuries, including institutionally. Nursing care for the sick – note: and end-of-life care –, poor relief, the right of asylum, not to mention all forms of moral assistance.” (ac , 471).

Martens, however, insists that the combating of evil through charitable activities of all kinds took place “primarily” at the level of individual assistance (ibid.).

In other words (and here the influence of socialist religious criticism is very palpable as it broke through in church circles in the 1960s and 1970s): “People thought too little about changing the structures of society in such a way” (ac , 472) that social justice in the Biblical sense would become a reality.

Historical context.

Compared to pagan antiquity, Christian charity was already a tremendous step forward two thousand years ago (ibid.). Indeed: Jesus—following a prelude in the Old Testament—combined love for God and love for one's neighbor into one indivisible axiom of Christian practice.

Liturgy: His miracles! Jesus preached His message of salvation, namely acquiring a treasure in heaven, by starting by eliminating earthly misery.

The sinners—sin is also an evil in the Christian sense—the poor, the sick—to which we add: outcasts (let us think of his defense of the adulterous woman, for example) were devoted to his constant missionary attention.

Maertens: all this does not prevent active commitment in the form of science – e.g. medical science –, legal improvement, technological development, – we add to this: general development (e.g. in developing countries) – from also being a form of charitable approach to evil and suffering in the world. The faithful have not lagged behind in this.

But Jesus—and in his wake his followers—was never a “socialist revolutionary” as some believers wish to reinterpret him : the cause of evil, a cause that is itself an evil, is situated too far in the mysterious depths of earthly existence for that.

21.4. Suffering

21.4.1. Suffering as a condition of the good.

“Let us realize that evil and suffering are simply a condition for bringing about something better. In the nature of: the burden of an examination period leads to the joy of the diploma; an illness leads to purification, to attention for others. (ac , 476).

Did Jesus not say: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it bears no fruit”? This is ancient wisdom that even pagans and unbelievers recognize. Thus Maertens is called “the reward for the next generation of a Greek insight” (ac , 477). Is this not the interpretation of virtually all true parents who “do it for their children?”

All consciously made sacrifices are endured as evil, because something good emerges from them. Maertens does not seem to appreciate this very much, for he immediately points out the twofold finitude of suffering as a condition for the solution of problems.

1. *The suffering is very ambivalent.*

In addition to certain compensations, it brings much misfortune, and sometimes there seems to be no counterbalance available. In other words: either the good does not emerge, or the sufferer comes out of it more degraded.

2. *Suffering: a scandal for thought.*

Even if one transfers the 'reward' (i.e., the good attained through suffering) to an afterlife, suffering remains a scandal “to the mind” (ac , 477).

We would improve: “a scandal, yes, for purely emotional thinking, following moments of crisis in the emotional life”.

His decision:

“In any case, the creativity (*note*: that suffering creates something good) of suffering remains an insufficient explanation. (ac , 477). If 'insufficient' means 'partially', agreed; but if 'insufficient' means—to use a Camus for whom Maertens shows much sympathy— 'illusory ', then this is unprovable.

The sacrifices made by so many people who consciously suffer for others—parents, socially committed individuals (let us think of Mother Teresa in India, for example)—are for them a reason that is, for the time being, more than sufficient.

Maertens, too, attempted to refute this interpretation of sacrifice by stating that it is 'logos', rationality, which merely provides insight. As if insight were not ultimately very much, indeed, everything.

21.4.2. The humanist interpretation of the connection “suffering / something good”.

Maertens does not define very sharply what he understands by 'humanism'. For there is, for instance, Christian humanism which, with roots in the Bible, has emerged especially since the Renaissance, and there is atheistic humanism (e.g. the existentialist humanism of Jean Paul Sartre).

The believer exploits the relative autonomy of all creation, especially of man, to develop a world and a course of life that bears witness to human creativity. J.P. Sartre's atheism defines autonomy as 'délaissement', radical autonomy in a universe without the sacred or without God.

“If God does not exist, then everything is – at least in principle – permitted” was Sartre’s interpretation of the basis of his humanism.

On that humanist basis, in an apparently godless sense, one can – according to Maertens – interpret the causal link “suffering/compensation” as follows.

1. An incentive.

Man demonstrates his fundamental freedom by overcoming the pressure of the environment—“all kinds of determinisms, all kinds of obstacles (oc, 478)—indeed seeing a challenge in it rather than fatalistically resigning himself to it. Suffering is a value in the growth process of man” (ac, 478). Thus Maertens. One sees this, for example, in upbringing that “pampers” children: the result risks being that they become too weak in the struggle that encompasses a lifetime.

2. An alarm system.

“Dizziness,” says Maertens, “helps us prevent a fatal fall by giving us the illusion of it before we actually fall (oc ibid). A sense of shame alerts us

regarding our dishonorable behavior. Our organism has a sense of pain to warn us that something is not right.”

3. A sacrifice.

“Even outside the religious context, sacrifice can be experienced as a value” (ibid). One can even view death as a sacrifice of the individual in service of the species. Yet here again Maertens' strong reservation: “But what if one denies oneself everything for years for a goal that one ultimately misses?” (ac , 479).

So too, for example: what if a mother gives birth to a disabled child? Maertens concludes with the finiteness of logical insight: so much tragedy remains that cannot be made comprehensible.

Our criticism is: The fact that we fail to gain sufficient cognitive insight does not prevent an objectively meaningful structure of evil and suffering from being at work.

21.4.3. The Book of Job.

Maertens limits his exposition on what the Old Testament says about the evil that causes suffering to this world-renowned book. To first summarize what he says, the following.

1. Maertens first views Job's reckoning with a traditional interpretation. If one has lived without conscience, God punishes this by sending evil and by causing atonement through suffering. He calls this “the traditional doctrine of suffering as punishment.” This still persists in *John 9:2-3* : “Who has sinned?”

2. Job considers himself innocent

He therefore strongly protests against the interpretation of his friends who apply a traditional framework of thought without addressing the question of whether Job is actually guilty. The author (...) thus clearly states the central problem: that of innocent suffering.

This problem remains relevant: even now, all kinds of innocent people are bombarded with setbacks. (ac , 480). - In doing so, Maertens remains within the boundaries of Camus and his terrible death struggle of an innocent child, - together with the very emotional reactions to it.

Existential.

Consequently, the Book of Job is 'existential', as it remains within the emotional reaction to incomprehension, misunderstood, 'absurd', and suffering. Maertens therefore emphasizes that Job, too, calls “God cruel, a guardian of mankind, a lurking lion” in the rebellious phase of his reaction.

Paradox.

“In the midst of this – 'emotional' (we add) cursing of God, Job paradoxically continues to believe in Him” (ac , 4486) – “I know that my ' goel ', my defender, lives – that he will act as the one who has the last word. After my awakening (*note*: after my death) he will bring me justice before him. In my flesh (*note*: also with my body, cf. *Psalms* 16 (15): 9/10) I will see God”. (*Job* 19: 25/26).

In other words: this resembles what Peter will later experience as a grace in the midst of an emotional situation: he emphatically denies more than once that he was Jesus' disciple (*John* 18:25/27). Whereupon the rooster crows! But Jesus' prayer for him results in his faith being preserved, despite the means of emotional confusion.

That paradox is, in other words, the result of faith on the part of man, but at the same time of grace—pure grace—on the part of God, who, amidst the emotion (annoyance, general confusion), makes man receptive to reason. In other words: amidst cognitive incomprehension , sense reveals itself to the objective sense at work in evil and suffering. Expressed in a religious sense: God has His reasons, which even our believing reason cannot easily grasp.

21.4.4. The theme of Jesus as the God-man who dies but rises again.

Maertens ac ; 482: “There is the enormous new fact that Jesus, the Son of God, himself suffered. (...). All stories of the Passion culminate in the resurrection and a new beginning. What naturally recurs, given the foregoing, is that “He who is innocence by definition, also took upon himself human suffering in all its forms: physical and moral pain, loneliness and weariness, and death.” (ac , 482).

The traditional interpretation “guilt of sin / punishment”.

In *Mark* 2:1/12 , when Jesus heals a paralytic, a connection is clearly evident: “My child, your sins are forgiven” (*Mark* 2:9). Precisely to show, visibly—immediately before all present—that Jesus “has the power to forgive

sins on earth” (*Mark 2:10*), he commands the paralytic to take up his bed as one healed .

Incidentally:

When Jesus institutes the celebration of the Eucharist, his wording is crystal clear: “for many as forgiveness of sins (*Matthew 26:28*) and for the establishment of the new covenant (*Jeremiah 31:31/34* ; *Epistle to the Hebrews 8:8:12*), precisely in the wake of that forgiveness of sins.

A radically new sense of meaning.

“To be a Christian now is: to take seriously the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God. And to take them together. In this way, a new perspective is opened on the suffering. (ac , *ibid*) – What the Eastern Christians called: the unity of the Places of the Cross and Resurrection Easters .

The annoying part remains, however.

In an initial reaction—Martens' dominant, so-called 'existential' stance—“one rebels against suffering itself. Christ's attitude in the Garden of Olives is telling in this respect. (...). Job's rebelliousness even finds a dramatic echo in one of Jesus' last words, in which he cries out his total desolation.” (..)

Act of redemption.

By—as Paul will say—dying with Christ and rising with him, we share in the redemptive effect of Jesus' Passover event, which he, as the “servant of the Lord,” realized not so much for himself alone (he did not need it from within himself as a radically sinless being), but as a kind of summary of all people in what he is and does: he took our death upon himself but bestowed upon us his resurrection glory.

21.4.5. A concluding remark.

Before taking leave of our text that served as a stimulus, one more point. Maertens speaks of the specificity of Christian ethics (ac , 486). He finds this in our attitude towards suffering, in the radical form of love even towards those who make us suffer, in the mysteriousness of a love with which we also reach people we do not even know. This is certainly correct, yet an impression of vagueness remains.

Let us return to *Mark 2:1/12* (the healing of the paralytic). When—after discussion with the scribes—the moment of Jesus’ action, of dealing with the evil, the paralyzed condition, and the suffering, the daily suffering that paralysis entails for the one who is paralyzed and even more so for those around him, has arrived, under the inspiration of his heavenly Father and sustained by the life force represented by the Holy Spirit, he says: “So that you (*note*: primarily the disputing scribes) might know that the Son of Man (*note*: Jesus) has power on earth to forgive sins,—here he spoke to the paralytic:—“I say to you: ‘Arise, take your bed and go home.’” Immediately this man arose, took his bed, and went to him in the sight of all, so that all were astonished, praised God, and said: “Never have we seen such a thing.”

What is happening here?

Jesus first addresses the fundamental ethical situation: the man was not at peace with God and His commandments. Consequently, he suffered—according to mechanisms that do not directly concern us here—the unpleasant consequences of his 'sins'. Only when the true cause has been removed can the accompanying consequence be removed, in this case: a sense of abandonment.

Note: Jesus acts on earth.

He indeed saves from the heaven where he is at home, but he is certainly active on earth, removing the evil that clings to sin, the causative evil, and the suffering associated with it in a fundamental way.

There is no question of denying “the other world,” but neither is there any question of abandoning “this world”: it is precisely from “the other world,” which is ultimately the Holy Trinity in its supernatural life force, that 'salvation' comes “on earth.”

That is the paradox of the belief in another world as advocated by Christianity.