Summary of Text 21: Philosophizing about Evil

This text draws on G. Maertens' study *God and Suffering* to develop an in-depth philosophical analysis of evil and human suffering.

1. Definition and Typology of Evil

Suffering is described as the experience of pain, displeasure, or dissatisfaction; it is the passive human response to evil as a stimulus. Evil itself is defined as an alien or accidental deviation from the normal, purposeful course of a finite reality.

A strict distinction is made between two types of evil:

- *Physical evil*: Accidental deviations in natural processes without moral responsibility, such as an acorn being crushed by a passer-by or eaten by a squirrel.
- *Moral evil*: Deviations caused by beings endowed with understanding, conscience, and will, such as bullying a fellow student at school.

According to G. W. Leibniz, the metaphysical condition that makes both physical and moral evil possible lies in the finitude of creation. Since finite beings are not alone in the world, they are necessarily influenced and intersected by the rest of reality.

2. The Problem of Theodicy and God's Autonomy

The classical false dilemma posed by Epicurus and Voltaire holds that God is either not omnipotent (if He cannot prevent evil) or not perfectly good (if He does not wish to prevent it). The text criticizes this reasoning because it overlooks the relative autonomy of created beings and things. Because God respects the inherent laws of nature and human freedom and responsibility, He does not prevent every instance of evil. This does not prove His impotence or malevolence; rather, it demonstrates His respect for created freedom without resorting to authoritarian intervention.

3. Existential Emotion versus Speculative Reason

Following Albert Camus (and the death of the innocent child in *The Plague*), Maertens acknowledges that speculative or metaphysical meaning-making offers no help at the moment of an acute emotional shock. Text 21 qualifies this position: once the initial emotional storm subsides, the human need for rational and metaphysical meaning-making and for understanding the sufficient reason (Plato, Hegel) re-emerges. However, those who remain

trapped in pure emotion lapse into bitterness ("the foul mood"), leading to a loss of charity towards others and the creation of a caricature of God.

4. Typology of Attitudes towards Evil

Using the cognitive ABC model of Ellis & Sagarin (A = adversity/evil, B = mindset/interpretation, C = ultimate attitude), the text distinguishes several human responses:

Escapist attitudes:

- Buddhism: Sees suffering as the product of human desire and attempts, through psychological and mystical techniques, to mentally neutralize the world and suffering or reinterpret them as illusions.

- *Hedonism* (Aristippus, Epicurus): Seeks pleasure as compensation, but this remains a peripheral conception of happiness that can lead to human diminishment.

- *Psychedelism*: Uses hallucinogenic substances to escape cultural malaise ("Weltschmerz"), but fails to address the real causes and leads to addiction.

- *Suicide*: An irrational escape born of helplessness that occurs almost exclusively during an acute emotional crisis.

Defensive attitudes:

- *Revolt* (Camus): Recognizes existence as utterly absurd but chooses lucid rebellion and "active fatalism" without God (symbolized by the myth of Sisyphus).

- *Marxism*: Reduces evil to capitalist exploitation and regards religion as the opium of the people. This falls short because social reforms do not eliminate existential afflictions such as illness, moral guilt, and death at the bedside.

- *Christian Caritas*: Combats evil through concrete love of one's neighbour and individual assistance, although the need later arose to connect this with structural social reforms.

5. Suffering and Religious Meaning

Although suffering can serve a humanistic purpose as a stimulus, an alarm system (pain, shame), or a sacrifice, it remains a scandal to purely human reasoning.

The Old Testament (the Book of Job) rejects the traditional doctrine of retribution, according to which suffering is a punishment for sin. As an innocent sufferer, Job protests against his friends and struggles with God, yet paradoxically preserves his faith in his redeemer.

In the New Testament, Jesus, as the God-man, takes human suffering, guilt, and death upon Himself. Through the unbreakable unity of the Cross and the Resurrection, suffering acquires a radically new, redemptive perspective. Christian ethics does not flee the world but brings genuine salvation, forgiveness of sins, and healing to earth from a supernatural source.