



Review

The Enigma of Evil

by Christos Yannaras
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Reviewed by Alexandru Mălureanu

Christos Yannaras is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens and a philosopher and theologian of the Orthodox Church of Greece. He was born in 1935, he studied at the Universities of Athens, Thessalonica, Bonn and Paris. He holds doctorates in philosophy from the Sorbonne and in theology from Thessalonica.



Alexandru Mălureanu is PhD Student and Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Geneva, Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland

Yannaras tries to explain the problems facing the whole of creation, not only human beings but also animals and nature: earthquakes, disease, fire, flood, decay, panic, terror, injustice, massacre, violence, torture, mutilation, atrocity, sickness, accident, hurricane, tsunami, pain and death.

This may seem paradoxical and irrational. We cannot understand how bad can coexist with rationality and beauty of God's creation. We see hatred, sadism, criminality and we can't understand how is possible to exist in humanity's biostructure? So, in his book, Yannaras attempts to respond to the challenge of concerning the nature of evil. There are interesting chapters about „Attempts as interpreting evil”, „Existence as relation and nonrelation”, „How God knows good and evil and how we know it”, „The interpretation of the Christian Gospel in relation to participation in the fact of the Church”, „Angels and demons in the Judeo-Christian tradition”, „The absurdity of speaking of 'natural evil'”, „Pain as the experience of evil” and we can find if „Is death the end of existence?”.

The author shows that we usually call “natural evil” that which derives from nature, and moral evil, that which we owe to human behavior, but the supreme evil is death.

An interesting interpretation is that for human beings an earthquake can be a manifestation of evil, but for nature is part of the way it functions and is a manifestation of good, of vitality of the earth. We often see in “natural evil” an absurdity.

Yannaras says that the victims of accidents are indistinguishably the virtuous and the vile, the good and the malicious, the just and the unjust, the compassionate and the criminals. Nature takes no cognizance of moral qualities. In this case, we can say that the nature is identified with evil, because we see nature as hostile to the human person.

The most representative explications about origin of evil are the ontological dualism of Gnosticism (there is an evil god, who is pure matter; he is the creator of the visible cosmos, and the author of the evil that exists in the world; but there is also a good god, who is pure spirit and has task to liberate human

beings from the matter, from evil) and the Judeo-Christian view of the fall of Man (the origin of evil is in freedom; God is not the cause of evil, creation is very good).

By his fall, Man attracted the whole of the material creation into evil, torment, pain and death. Yannaras shows that the juridical scheme of the interpretation of the origin of evil (commandment/transgression, guilt/punishment) reflects the language of archetypal religious theories of the relation between humanity and the transcendent. But evil was understood not only in an abstract sense as transgression of the divine law, rebellion and human disobedience, but also in a personified sense (devil is the first hypostatic cause of evil), as identified with existences that were dark, treacherous and hostile to God: armies of demons lurked in every aspect of reality and fought ceaselessly to draw human beings into sin, to make them captives of evil. So we can say together with Saint Paul that „I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rom. 7, 23).

For ecclesial experience, evil has no ontological hypostasis, because no existent thing is evil by its nature or essence. Evil is based on freedom of rational existences (evil is a human choice, analogous to that of the demons), but the concept of evil does have an ontological content, which means that the freedom of personal existences can constitute evil as an event (a mode opposite to the Triadic mode of divine love).

Another fundamental idea of this book is that pain, decay and death define evil for humanity. But death is not the end of existence. Death is entry into life as relation, into salvation and abundance of life.

Church hopes and expects a bodily resurrection. The falling asleep of the saints (their death) is a celebration for the Church because in a relationship with the saints (the first fruits of its hopes), the existential fullness after death proclaimed by the Church is confirmed.

In conclusion, we can see that the enigma of evil must be understood in “relational ontology” that is presented in the life

of the Church, in relation to God. So, we can say that evil is a free choice of nonlove and nonrelation.

I would kindly recommend the book of Christos Yannaras to anyone who wants to learn more about "The Enigma of Evil".