

THEOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF EVIL

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THE NATURE OF EVIL

A valuable perspective on any worldview can be obtained from the way it handles the problem of evil—why flaws seem to appear in the fabric of the universe, why bad things happen to good people, why suffering and frustration occur at all.

Generally, the problem is put in this form in the West: If God is good, why does he permit evil? Could he not have made a universe in which it was not permitted? The existence of evil must mean either (a) that God is good but not all-powerful, or (b) that God is all-powerful but not entirely good. Either possibility would hardly be reassuring to fragile creatures like ourselves. The way Theosophy deals with this conundrum, and with the entire problem of evil, provides invaluable insights into the nature of its worldview.

First let us examine the nature of evil in fuller detail. There is no avoiding the fundamental fact that evil exists in human experience, whether you interpret it as illusion or necessity or whatever. It gnaws like a cankerworm at our otherwise beautiful universe and leaves very little of it untouched.

Evil exists in innumerable forms and has a variety of immediate causes. Some evil stems from human choice, from those who rob, cheat, lie, torture, and kill. Indeed, few of us have hands and hearts wholly clean of at least the milder human sins, or the desire to commit them. If nothing more, we are guilty of countless sins of omission—of failure to do all we could on all occasions to alleviate the suffering of man or beast and to spread healing love.

Suffering also exists, apparently, as a part of nature itself: the city leveled by earthquake, the child wasted by incurable disease, the helpless animal devoured by a predator.

All this we see, and we feel within that it should not be. We might define evil as that which we feel ought not to be, yet is. In the words of St Paul, it is the “mystery of iniquity”; in those of Jesus, “the abomination . . . standing where it ought not.”

What ought not to be . . . it seems to me that, fundamentally, evil blocks or prevents something from being what it is or is meant to become in accordance with its

intrinsic nature. It is that which prevents a living creature from completing its life-cycle, from passing through the normal processes of gestation, growth, maturity, and old age. On a deeper level, it cuts the creature off from enjoying the unbounded fullness of life which all living things desire and which lies behind their need to eat, rest, mate, and play.

That which arrests this cycle and destroys this fulfillment we call evil: the animal killed (as most are) before the natural end of its life, the soldier hardly more than a boy blown to pieces in war, the victim of Auschwitz, all those sent to the grave early by plague and famine. All these horrors and countless others, from the ordinary human point of view, deprive these lives of their total meaning. For we see a life as most fulfilled if its full potential is allowed expression before it is terminated.

As if that were not enough, evil has two more disturbing features. First, it challenges any view we may have that the universe is rational. It makes us wonder if it works by any coherent principles comprehensible to human intellect or compatible with human purposes. For certainly nothing appears less rational than a universe whose beauty and harmony are spoiled by the cruel suffering embedded in it, and which spawns living things wholesale of which few will complete the life-cycle programmed into their structures.

In the last analysis, nothing is more profoundly depressing than a suspicion—or conviction—that the universe in which we find ourselves is pointless and irrational to the core. In such a universe a relatively few good days would be about all any creature is likely to get, and anything bad, however heartless and senseless, could happen to anyone at any time. Yet evidence around us pointing in that direction is far from lacking. To fend off its terror, humans have constructed all sorts of philosophical battlements and strained mightily to see the world's rewards and punishments distributed more even-handedly than appears on the surface. The struggle against seeing universal moral unreason is far from won in the minds of many; dread of irrationality at the ultimate level must be considered among evil's deepest-cutting weapons.

Second, evil spreads its pall beyond those directly affected. We feel a natural empathy—or fear—when we see others afflicted. In proportion to our sensitivity, we feel pain, sorrow, and pity at the suffering of a fellow-creature. We may also experience anxiety to the point of anguish that the suffering may spread. As Dostoevsky powerfully showed in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the suffering of a single abused child anywhere forever destroys any illusion that all around us is wholly good on any level, or even that such suffering as exists is clearly deserved.

Finally, the self-perpetuating character of evil must be mentioned. No single outcropping of evil is sufficient unto itself, for each inevitably appears as a part of a

great interlocking web in which natural and human evil are intertwined and in which the evil tends to spread out from its initial epicenter like a pestilence.

An earthquake does not only raze a city; it also brings in its wake fire, famine, and disease. These in turn may arouse in their victims such privation and rage as to stir them to theft, murder, and even war. A neglected child is more likely to neglect his or her own children than one well cared for. If one child throws a stone at a bird others may follow suit, though the cruel sport might not have occurred to them otherwise. It is well known that war systematically degrades many of those who take part in it, making them, out of fear and callousness, progressively capable of greater and greater acts of violence, lust, and sadism. The fighting man who starts out full of chivalrous ideals about the campaign is very likely, six months later, to live only for survival and the release of unbearable tension that comes from violence. He will shoot whatever moves, shrink at any noise, and kill his enemy by whatever means are at hand.

These indications give some hint of the extent of the evil which infests our cosmos. How does Theosophy interpret it?

Theosophy gives several answers to the problem. It suggests that not just one but several forces may be at work to create the evil we see around us. This in itself is significant, for it is what we should expect if evil is, in fact, fundamentally irrational, a reversion to chaos and meaninglessness. If evil had but one clear-cut cause, it would be more rational than it is.

As we examine the Theosophical explanations, let us bear in mind that they must be received in the same way as all Theosophical lore, in freedom and in full realization that all such statements can only be fingers pointing at the moon or like stages in jnana yoga, exercises to be worked through on the road to deeper and deeper realization. Some may be more important than others. Some may be allegories or even among the "blinds" of which H. P. Blavatsky spoke. Yet all these perspectives are, I think, worth studying insofar as they reflect the complexity of the "problem of evil" (or the problem of suffering, as it would more likely be called in the East).

For though the Theosophical explanations are several, it is worth noting what they leave out. None display the defiant personal antagonist in rebellion against the personal patriarchal Father-God of Western monotheism, nor do any suggest a riotous polytheism in which careless or malicious spirits may do wickedness out of sheer caprice. Rather, all disharmonies can be understood as conditions logically inherent in a manifested consciousness-matter universe, or inseparable from the struggles and dangers embedded in the developmental path sentient beings in such a universe must follow. Let us now look at these explanations one after the other.

1. THE BINARY NATURE OF REALITY

H.P. Blavatsky in several places in *The Secret Doctrine* suggests that when the One became two, and then further subdivision takes place, evil is let in. She points out that the Pythagoreans “hated the Binary,” believing that the “One was alone good”; for with the coming of two or more, the road forks and diverges into Good and Evil (1979, 2:574-575).

As the light of expressed creation spreads out it may be called God or Satan. *Demon est deus inversus*. In the complexity of the forking road life and death, good and evil both present themselves, “for death on earth becomes life on another plane” (ibid., 2:513).

We read also that duality is “the origin of Evil, or Matter”—referring back to the breakdown of the original outflow into subject and object, spirit and matter, of which we have already spoken. This does not mean that matter as such is evil, but rather that the dualism, and then the “manyness,” ingrained in the coexistence of matter and spirit is the inevitable seedbed of discord and thus of evil. For when many different entities—atoms, molecules, and the rest—are put into play, any number of possible combinations will emerge, not all benign one to another.

For that matter, this does not mean that the material universe of multiplicity is real in every sense of the word. Misperceptions on this score are part of the problem. Physical nature is “a bundle of most varied illusions on the plane of deceptive perceptions” in which “every pain and suffering [is] but the necessary pangs of incessant procreation” (ibid., 2:475). Even more fundamental than the multiplicity of the material side of creation as a cause of evil is the difficult relationship between it and the spirit side. For spirit tends to see the material universe as other than itself and capable of imposing harsh limitations on it—making us think we are, say, a soul trapped in a fleshly casket—rather than understanding that matter is to be a cooperater with spirit’s evolution.

The real solution to the problem of evil, we are here told in *The Secret Doctrine*, lies in understanding the truth about human nature. It is more than the transitory physical, it is “the divine within the animal” (Blavatsky 1979, 2:476). Human nature has a destiny that is only tangential to external nature, though at present painfully intertwined with it.

A first clue regarding evil, then, is that its “blockage” quality may not be what it seems. We see only the outer half of what is going on; what appears to be death may really be greater life.

2. EVOLUTION

The reason for apparent duality is the way in which the universe and all the teeming beings who dwell in it are evolving. When the One first extended itself into creation, there was, as we have seen, a kind of “fall”—a necessary involvement with the limitation and dualism inherent in changing forms. What comes into being cannot abide but must change and so “die” to one form, as it passes through the Cycle of Necessity on the great pilgrimage back to the One.

“God is light and Satan is the necessary darkness or *shadow* to set it off, without which pure light would be invisible and incomprehensible” (ibid., 2:305). This force or light serves “to create and destroy” insofar as it is the “finite in the Infinite.” The Satan principle involves death and rebirth in new forms as its necessary work moves forward. It is like a reducing valve which, as entities make their pilgrimage through the seven globes and various Races, gradually forces light into matter more and more. This permits the Pilgrims to experience matter in all its riotous multiplicity before it is slowly released again for the return.

The nature of evolution is to change, and therefore it destroys, even though its course is upward as it returns after involution to its eternal source. One cause of apparent evil, then, is the process of evolution. The blockage of one creature or species may be only for the sake of allowing a more advanced form to take its place as evolution moves forward.

To say that, however, is to deal only superficially with the real, and often uncomprehended, pain of the frightened individual creature. Theosophy has little sympathy for materialistic Darwinism and its casual acceptance of “Nature red in tooth and claw.” Rather, it seeks to show, through the concept of karma, that the suffering of individuals is ultimately evolutionary in intent.

3. KARMA

Karma, the “Absolute and Eternal Law in the World of Manifestation” (ibid., 2:510) is the impersonal force which brings retribution dictated by each being through thoughts, words, and deeds—not by “destroying intellectual and individual liberty” but in order to demonstrate that we must live with the consequences of our choices.

Karma can, of course, also be beneficent; good deeds and thoughts produce favorable results. Nevertheless, along with happiness and opportunity, all human suffering, in fact, is finally attributable to karma and so to human free will, whatsoever attendant cause may also be involved.

Yet karma is not a “blockage” any more than is evolution, for though it may seem to obstruct the development of a life when it brings sickness, disaster, or premature

death, yet it does not hinder but rather advances evolution through the free flow of spiritual cause. “Intimately, or rather indissolubly, connected with karma, then, is the law of rebirth, or of the reincarnation of the same spiritual individuality in a long, almost interminable, series of personalities . . . like the various characters played by the same actor” (ibid., 2:306). Again, the apparent evil caused by karmic retribution is ultimately an illusion of partial vision which sees the outer result but not the inner cause and consequence.

We may, of course, ask why it has to be this way in the first place. Could there not have been a universe without karma because it was perfect from the beginning and never lost that perfection, hence had no need for salutary retribution? This query can have several possible answers.

A. First, those who want to live in such a perfect universe can. That is the condition attributed in effect to God-realized beings in all spiritual traditions, to saints and buddhas and sages. Their wisdom and compassion transcends all that can hurt or hinder. Though surrounded by the karmic universe, they are untouched by it, and for them it does not exist save as the realm where their compassion must operate. Karma exists only for those who act as though it does.

B. Second, as we have seen, the universe of matter and multiplicity exists as a force-field in which interaction—call it karma—takes place between entities on some level. To call for the abolishment of karma in a universe of matter and multiplicity is to call for a contradiction in terms. It would be simply to ask the abolishment of the universe as such and for the reunion of all things in the inchoate nameless Root.

C. Thus, the karmic field simply *is*. To ask why is as far beyond the reach of human mind as to ask why there is being itself. In Theosophy, karma—and so its fruits—is not to be laid at the feet of a jealous god but is just the way things are and must be if there is being at all. The good news is that the shadow side of karma is as insubstantial compared to the splendid hope ahead of us as are the shades of night compared to sunrise.

D. A clue to karma’s necessity lies in the Theosophical identity of consciousness and the ultimate nature of reality. For thought is a constant process of shifting change, moving from cause to effect, finally unifying entities in a single integrating thought as will seeking joy moves to its consummation. If the universe is a great thought, it must separate, test relationships and interactions, and then unite.

4. INITIATION

Yet another interpretation of evil, in the sense of suffering, is related to Theosophy’s widespread use of the language of initiation into the Mysteries. Initiation

means accelerated growth in wisdom and a rapid expansion of awareness of the inner realities of things. This cannot be brought about without the transformation of the self—a process which, whether carried out in ritual or in the midst of the experiences of life, is like speeded-up evolution. There is that which must be destroyed and that which must be quickened. Thus H. P. Blavatsky describes the “Twelve Tortures” of the ancient Egyptian initiation (1897, 5:290; 1980, 241). Charles W. Leadbeater tells us that the fourth initiation on the path of adepthood parallels the crucifixion of Christ, and so includes suffering, the greatest of which is not physical but the aloneness that is the dark night of the soul.

The suffering of initiation may be sought deliberately, or one may, so to speak, be pulled through it. It may be “programmed” as a mystery rite, like the often hard and painful initiations of Native American cultures. Or, it may be one of life’s “natural” initiations, from birth through maturation to sickness and death. In any case though the anguish is real, it can be borne without complaint by the candidate who knows its meaning and can envision the goal.

5. BLACK MAGIC

A major theme of Blavatsky’s first book, *Isis Unveiled*, is that magic demonstrates the existence of nonmaterial reality and so is an invaluable indicator of the true inner nature of things. Yet, if white magic exists, so also must black magic. We are told several times of its possibility and reality (1897, 5:37-38; 1980, 37-38), although Blavatsky does not take all accounts of black magic at face value.

First, a word to the reader. The notion of black magic is likely to give rise to wild and bizarre images or suggest something better left to fantasy fiction or sensational tabloids. We must realize, though, that for Theosophy magic really refers simply to power exercised through consciousness. We all practice magic all the time when through our conscious will we control ourselves or influence others. Magic is “black” if that power is exerted for self-centered ends. On this level, then, magic is no more and no less mysterious than ordinary consciousness interacting with body and environment. Insofar as such faculties as clairvoyance, telepathy, or psychokinesis are real, their role in the implementation of such magic, white or black, cannot be discounted. But however and by whomever exercised, whether called black magic or not, the real exercise of evil on the human plane is always linked to human selfishness, callousness, and cruelty, not to “occult forces” in themselves. These latter are as neutral as the knife held in the human hand and controlled by the human mind, which may be used to chop vegetables or to kill.

The Mahatma Letters refers from time to time to *dugpas*, Tibetan black magicians who can cause a great deal of localized evil. They are said to provoke vanity (371) and

are even given permission to deceive chelas, disciples of Masters, for the student's own ultimate good (223). They sowed dissension in the London Lodge (459), for those who are "most devoted to the Cause, Masters, Theosophy, call it by whatever name—are those that are the most tried" (459).

More powerful than the *dugpas* are the Dark Chohans (Ma-Mo Chohans)—imperfect "gods," or rather black magicians on a cosmic scale, who play a dominant role in the cycles of dissolution of ages and worlds and spread ignorance and destruction (*ibid.*, p. 96). But the Masters of the Light have no right to impede such work nor that of the *dugpas*, for it has its purpose, so long as its agents obey occult laws and do not cross the paths of their betters.

We see therefore that certain specific examples of evil, perhaps even on a planetary scale, may not be the result of evolution or karma directly. Rather it may result from a particular individualized consciousness who has mastered certain occult arts and employs them—as is his prerogative under the laws of karma and free will—for evil ends which may work harm to others.

But though he meant it for ill, higher powers than the black adept's can turn it to good, and the evil may ultimately redound to spiritual growth for someone or some world. It may be that certain particularized outbreaks of evil in human history, especially those that are utterly nonrational and disproportionate to the events that caused them—famine, pointless violence and war, cruelty and persecutions, whether those of Nazi Germany or more recently in Cambodia—are the work of some powerful dark magus of this sort whose hand reached for a brief span into human history. This interpretation would in no way relieve the responsibility of those who, by active or passive choice, allowed themselves to become the human vehicles of that dark enchantment. But it can permit speculation on the "deep background" of episodes which otherwise seem out of place, even in the oft-gloomy annals of human history.

6. RELIGION

In a celebrated passage, *The Mahatma Letters* tell us that "evil is the exaggeration of good, the progeny of human selfishness and greediness" and that "save death—which is no evil but a necessary law, and accidents which will always find their reward in a future life—the *origin* of every evil whether small or great is in human action, in man whose intelligence makes him the one free agent in Nature" (274).

We are here told it is excess above the normal needs of life—selfishness in food and drink, sex and shelter, travel and pleasure—that produces one-third of human evil. For the rest: "I will point out the greatest, the chief cause of nearly two-thirds of the evils that pursue humanity ever since that cause became a power. It is religion

under whatever form and in whatsoever nation" (274).

This statement sounds surprising—even shocking—at first glance, yet a moment's reflection will reveal its truth. It is not intended as an attack on religion as such. Rather, it is a blunt observation of how religion, broadly defined, is far too often used in human life.

Simple animal selfishness and hedonism do not account for the greatest and most pervasive evils in human history. The foulest massacres, the most degrading exploitation, the wickedest perversions of truth and beauty have not been committed merely to pander to ordinary greed but for the sake of something supposedly higher, often by zealots who for the sake of their cause have themselves sacrificed much. This "something higher" takes many forms—God or the gods, faith, pride of tribe or class or country, the revolutionary impulse which seeks to destroy all, that (as it believes) all may be reborn fresh and pure.

In the past, these causes were usually identified with religion in the conventional sense, with the will of God or the battle-frenzy of a tribal Wotan. In more recent times the names of the gods have changed to such abstractions as nation, race, and ideology. But they all come under the definition suggested by the cited passage from *The Mahatma Letters*, which goes on in the next sentence to say, "It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind" (274). On the basis of twentieth-century experience, surely it is no great extrapolation to include among "those illusions that man looks upon as sacred" the blinding passions of distorted nationalism and ideology, and in the "sacerdotal caste" the propagandists and secular messiahs who have fed these and fed upon them.

In our own century, the evil wrought by simple greed, great as it is, pales beside that brought about by such faiths as imperialism, Nazism, Communism, nationalism, and resurgent fundamentalism within a number of religions. These enslavements of the spirit, possibly abetted by black magic, clearly count for more than mere thralldom to the flesh.

Yet we must remember again that "evil is the exaggeration of good." Religion, however broadly defined, is certainly not evil *per se*. Indeed, it may be a matter of the worst being a corruption of the best. Religion, insofar as it represents a yearning after something more than mere material existence, an effort of the divine within to break free and be itself, an assertion that the ultimate causes and ends are spiritual, is the impulse to truth. But how easily this aspiration becomes satisfied with partial truths which become idols clung to with all the passion proper to the whole truth and becomes diverted into the evil of which religion is capable!

The Theosophical attitude toward religion can easily be oversimplified and misunderstood. Blavatsky and other classic Theosophical writers vehemently attacked whole colleges of theologians. Yet they also affirmed that a core of truth lies in all religions and that, at the inception of each, lies the work of a Master of the Wisdom who enshrined in its central symbols important elements of the ancient truth than which no religion is higher. Not all religion is equally good or bad, and in all there is at least a potential for good as well as for evil. We shall examine this question in more detail in the next chapter.

7. JEHOVAH-SATAN

The Secret Doctrine devotes much attention to a complex argument that Jehovah and Satan are one and the same. In this context Jehovah is to be distinguished from God as the Infinite Reality behind the outflowings of creation and Satan from the serpent of Eden, who is the “Bright Angel” Lucifer, the “Light Bearer” who conveys only wise advice.

This argument may seem puzzling and disturbing to many readers and out of keeping with the tone they perceive in Theosophical literature elsewhere. To what degree it may be taken as allegory or symbol is open. The case may be brought entirely, if one wishes, under *The Secret Doctrine's* declaration elsewhere:

To some extent, it is admitted that even the Esoteric Teaching is allegorical. To make the latter comprehensible to the average intelligence, the use of symbols cast in an intelligible form is needed. Hence the allegorical and semi-mythical narratives in the exoteric, and the only semi-metaphysical and objective representations in the Esoteric Teachings. For the purely and transcendently spiritual conceptions are adapted only to the perceptions of those who “see without eyes, hear without ears, and sense without organs.” (2:81)

However, some treatment here of the Jehovah-Satan material is called for, because it comes up sometimes in discussion of Theosophical literature, including that of its adversaries, and because it appeals to a deep sense many have of the “fallen” nature of our world as it is. I would also like to stress that the use of Hebrew terminology in such discussions simply derives from ancient Gnostic usage and has nothing to do with a critique of Judaism as a religion. With this Blavatsky was on excellent terms, as is shown by her extensive employment of the Kabbala, the Jewish mystical system. Indeed, Kabbalism has its ultimate roots in the same thought-world as Gnosticism; both are related attempts to find deep levels of inner meaning within the Hebrew scriptures.

In these *Secret Doctrine* passages, as in certain ancient Gnostic systems, the Jehovah-Satan figure represents a lower creator whose division of humanity into male

and female was the real cause of trouble in the Garden of Eden, not the serpent's sage advice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "The appellation Sa'tan, in Hebrew *shātān* . . . belongs by right to the first and cruelest 'adversary of all the other Gods'—Jehovah" (1979, 2:387). "Satan represents metaphysically simply the *reverse or the polar opposite* of everything in nature. He is the 'adversary,' allegorically, the 'murderer,' and the great Enemy of *all*, because there is nothing in the whole Universe that has not two sides—the reverses of the same medal. But in that case, light, goodness, beauty, etc., may be called Satan with as much propriety as the Devil, since they are the *adversaries* of darkness, badness and ugliness" (1979, 2:389).

Thus the idea of Satan can be taken to represent merely the necessary dualism of manifested existence, to which we have referred above under the section "The Binary Nature of Reality." Nevertheless, as the "lower creator" theme suggests, *The Secret Doctrine* also shows considerable sympathy for the position of those ancient Gnostic groups which saw Jehovah-Satan as "a proud, ambitious, and impure spirit who has abused his power by usurping the place of the *highest God*, though he was no better, and in some respects far worse than his *brethern Elōhīm*; the latter representing the all-embracing, manifested Deity. . ." (ibid.).

Here, and in *Isis Unveiled* (1972, 2:184), Blavatsky commends the myth of those Gnostics who said that Jehovah-Satan, often named Ilda-Baoth, was a proud spirit who set out to create a world of his own but bungled the job and left only a flawed earth peopled by monstrous creatures. Yet he could not prevent man from possessing a soul which linked him to his wise mother, Sophia (Wisdom), and the light of the supreme Being. As man aspired toward higher things, Ilda-Baoth was filled with rage toward his own creation and sought—as he still does—to destroy his handiwork. Bearing in mind that this Gnostic allegory informs us that Ilda-Baoth was aided in his labor by his malicious sons, the planetary spirits, we find the matter well summed up in a striking passage in *The Secret Doctrine*:

The One is infinite and unconditioned. It cannot create, for It can have no relation to the finite and conditioned. If everything we see, from the glorious suns and planets down to the blades of grass and the specks of dust, had been created by the Absolute Perfection and were the direct work of even the *First Energy* that proceeds from It, then every such thing would have been perfect, and unconditioned, like its author. The millions upon millions of imperfect works found in Nature testify loudly that they are the products of finite, conditioned beings—though the latter were and are Dhyān Chohans, Archangels, or whatever else they may be named. In short, these imperfect works are the unfinished production of evolution, under the guidance of imperfect Gods. (1897, 5:213-14; 1980, 181)

We see here a subtheme of *The Secret Doctrine* and other Theosophical sources

which is, among other things, yet another interpretation of evil, that the actual creation as we know it is the handiwork of chains of relatively imperfect “gods” ranging between our level and the Ultimate. In particular, it is to be laid at the doorstep of an arrogant but incompetent blunderer like Ilda-Baath.

Whether one thinks of such propositions as literally or only allegorically true, they can meet an “existential” need for dealing with evil which goes beyond just attributing it to various “laws.” Such explanations do not entirely satisfy the rage and despair the world’s suffering evokes. We still want to ask over and over, why does a universe which contains even “rational” evil have to exist at all? Even if evil can be explained as necessitated by karma, by the evolutionary process, by the fundamental dualism which manifestation entails, the question still remains as to the necessity for so much suffering.

One answer is that the God of this world is, at best, imperfect and, at worst, a vindictive, incompetent blunderer into whose world we, whose true home is in halls of light far above his sway, are entrapped until, by following the slow path of evolution and initiation, we free ourselves from his grasp.

Perhaps we do need to follow the Cycle of Necessity: We need to move through the chains of worlds and races. It is necessary that we experience choice and the realm of matter, because a dualism of spirit and matter is “built-in” to a universe of manifestation and separateness, and choice is incumbent in a universe whose reality is also the unity of consciousness and matter. Still we might feel that there is more behind the extent of evil we know in this world. Something went wrong. A malevolent though finite entity pretending to be a god is also loose in our particular corner of the space-time continuum, where he has fouled the relationship of spirit and matter, leaving us more deeply trapped in space and time than need be. The notion that this world with its laws was made by imperfect beings, without the direct license of the supreme One whose nature we share but who does not directly create, can be a supportive idea.

Those higher yet impure beings should not, however, be made scapegoats and excuses for human folly. If lords of darkness, whether *dugpas* or maddened gods, spoil our world, it is because, in some way, we have let them do so.

SUMMING UP

Let us reflect on the truth that ours is an appropriate—even propitious—time to discuss the problem of evil. Not only have the manifold horrors of our age brought home to us the urgency of the problem, but they have shattered many illusions and many complacent misunderstandings of the scope and depth and tenaciousness of evil. Such awareness should be no stranger to theosophists, who see the history of our globe scarred with many cataclysms unexpected by most, and marked by the rise and

fall of race upon race, nation upon nation, empire upon proud empire.

In the high noon of Europe's nineteenth-century confidence and global domination, for example, Helena Blavatsky proved a better prophet (or rather recorder of prophecy) than many when she wrote, "It is simply knowledge, and mathematically correct computations, which enable the WISE MEN OF THE EAST to foretell, for instance, that England is on the eve of such or another catastrophe; that France is nearing such a point of her Cycle; and that Europe in general is threatened with, or rather is on the eve of, a cataclysm to which her own Cycle of racial *Karma* has led her" (1979, 1:646). These and similar lines were discussed in an interesting article, "H.P.B. and the War," which appeared in *The Theosophist* (Adyar) of August, 1940, just after the fall of France to Hitler's armies, when all appeared dark indeed to those the magazine elsewhere spoke of as the Forces of Good, and of Light.

Ours is, in the words of Jacob Needleman, a "time between dreams." Old comfortable beliefs—in dogmatic religion, in progress, in human goodness—have been shattered, at least in the naive forms they were held only a few generations, or even a few decades, ago. One era is gone; the new dreams have not yet arisen.

Now, however, in a time of waking from dogmatic slumbers, before a possible next sleep, we can, if we have the courage, probe more deeply into the real condition of humanity and of nature than is possible when under the spell of pleasant fantasies. It is a dark time, but in darkness what light there is shines all the brighter. As we face evil unflinchingly we know its reality. If we do not succumb to the temptations of stylish melancholy or hopeless despair, but gaze clear-eyed upon evil's hideous face we can perceive its contours and features well. Knowing the shape of the dragon, we can ascertain where best to thrust the lance.

Theosophy offers weapons to fight evil and fend off despair. We can contain the power of evil by understanding its purpose in karma and evolution; its initiatory role; its necessity to the universe of manifestation; its sometime origins in black magic which can be combatted; its roots in spiritual illusions and cosmic entities above which we can rise.

We can realize there is that in each of us which never has been, and can never be, wholly under the power of any evil. For its nature comes from realms higher than evil's reach, and to them it will return.

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Theosophical Interpretations of Evil

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