

24th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF
THE POLISH PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

The Phenomenon of Evil

**The Booklet
of
Abstracts**

Warsaw, Staszic Palace, November 27-29, 2025

The Woman as a Figure of Evil

Abstract: In 1996, Polish public opinion was shocked by news of a crime: three high school students, two boys and a girl, murdered a young woman. Although the girl did not directly participate in the murder, she not only received a life sentence, like her friends, but also bore the brunt of the crime and became the focus of public condemnation, for whom she became the embodiment of evil. Thus, this event became part of a long tradition of 'hyperbolic stereotypes accompanying female criminality' (L. Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad, and Sad*, Little Brown Book Group 2008, p. 280).

Unlike the Other, whose distinction occurs in the medium of something general, the threshold separates the Alien from the own. According to Waldenfels, this is because there is no general medium for what is alien. It applies to gender differences, as according to him, there is no neutral 'third human being' who could distinguish between a woman and a man without any prejudice. In this sense, femininity is a radical alienness, because, as Waldenfels states "By the term 'radical' I designate an alienness that can neither be traced back to something of the own nor integrated into a whole, and which is therefore irreducible in the sense just explained" (B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2011, p. 75). Furthermore, he says that „the fact that there are binary standards is not itself subject to these standards, unless their genesis is once again concealed and the respective opposition is hypostatized" (B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 2011, p. 13).

The hypostasis is not axiologically neutral, because femininity, constituted in opposition to masculinity, treated as the norm, the normal state, the ideal and the model, takes on the meaning of disturbance, deviation, imperfection, lack and ultimately, evil. Although the experience of alienness is dialectically stretched between the poles of recognition and rejection, when radical alienness drifts towards hostility, its experience triggers a full range of emotions, from amazement through fear to a kind of dark fascination with evil. This is evil, which is not only the absence of good, although it would seem to be consistent with the genesis of femininity, but takes on a Manichean, demonic character, manifesting itself in various narratives, from myths, through psychiatry, to painting and literature.

Bogdan Banasiak, Faculty of Philosophy and History, University of Lodz, Poland

Marquise de Sade - Sacralisation and Problematisation of Violence

Plenary Lecture (online)

Marquis de Sade is one of the most controversial and shocking writers, a dark figure and clear-sighted thinker who—by combining pornography and philosophy—repelled and attracted in equal measure, and whose name has become a symbol of perversion (sadism) and scandal.

The study investigates the consequences of the Marquis's project, which, by describing the inevitable entanglement of the human being in what is extreme—eroticism, violence, crime, loneliness and death—demystifies traditionally understood values and points of support (the death of God), in order to sketch a perspective of integral sovereignty, that is, absolute freedom, which for the Marquis de Sade is the only freedom worthy of the name.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Andrej Božič, The Inštitut Nove revije, zavod za humanistiko, Ljubljana, Slovenia; The International Center of Studies on Contemporary Nihilism

**“/.../ ein durchs Dunkel getragenes Zeichen /.../”
The Counter-Wor(l)d of Paul Celan’s Poetry**

Plenary Lecture

Abstract: The presentation is dedicated to the discussion of—the a-phenomenality of—evil in the poetry of Paul Celan (1920–1970). Although it may seem—at least, at first sight—somewhat paradoxical and perplexing, since both the poet’s life as well as his oeuvre are fundamentally determined by the event of the Shoah, Celan never—as far as I am aware of, not even once—uses the term “evil” (neither as “das Böse” nor as “die Bosheit,” nor in any other of its variations) in the works published (or prepared for publication) during his lifetime. However, one can contend that the abysmal question(ability) of (historically and personally experienced) evil in Celan’s poetry (re-)appears through the multifariously manifested notion of “darkness” (“die Dunkelheit” or “das Dunkel”), which is also one of the central concepts of his auto-poetological deliberations. In the contribution, I attempt to approach, with regard to the problem of darkness, the inter-(con)textual correlation between the dimensions of the poetic (the “practice” of poetry) and the poetological (the “theory” of poetry) in Celan’s creativity by an interpretive contemplation upon a poem that poetically addresses darkness itself and at once allows to be itself read as an assertion of the darkness of poetry: the poem “Schliere” from the collection *Sprachgitter* (1959).

Incorrectness as a category of legal phenomenology

Abstract: The philosophical issue of evil, understood in its ontological, ethical, and axiological aspects, is considered by phenomenologists of law primarily as a normative category. It is not so much prescriptive, that is, serving to set standards of conduct, but rather it serves to evaluate the actions and conduct of individual legal subjects. In an axiological context, it would be an anti-value, while in a normative-evaluative context, it appears more in its adjectival form, that is, as a predicate (bad, evil) in the logical judgement “X is P”. This is related to the axiological assumptions and theses declared by phenomenologists of law, who admit values located in the sphere of alleged transcendence as a constant point of reference for philosophical reflection on the theory and practice of law. Norms, on the other hand, especially those of statutory law, are submitted to mundane transformations in respect of social and cultural contexts.

Contemporary phenomenology of law (*inter alia* Carlos Cossio, Simone Goyard-Fabre, and Paul Amselek) is based on the theses of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and Adolf Reinach’s a priori theory of law. Legal phenomenologists adopt certain assumptions from these initial conceptions, including: 1) apriorism combined with reflection on the rules of legal language and its logic (Reinach’s theory of legal speech acts), 2) transcendentalism and essentialism in reflection on norms and values (Husserl), and 3) existential and anthropological essentialism (Husserl and Heidegger). However, for the purposes of their research, phenomenologists of law paradoxically reconcile the divergences of realistic and idealistic considerations by emphasising the convergences. For they emphasise that established legal provisions (often related to cultural and historical relativism) assume and take into account a certain axiological domain that would be primary to norms – the domain of values that may be conceived as objectively binding, supra-cultural and supra-individual.

Normativity, as a written and unwritten set of norms, is therefore defined by phenomenologists in reference to values and axiology. Values are assumed by them as certain fixed points of reference (a “horizon of values” to be recognised), while norms make it possible – on the basis of values – to establish rules for various individual and collective practices within a given community and culture. In a semantic context, norms – like values – are conceived as certain meanings that guide conduct and action, binding and constituting a more or less coherent set (codes).

Nevertheless, when we ask about the category of evil and legal negative evaluations of conduct, it is difficult to refer to the anti-value of evil. It is easy to notice that in such cases, lawyers refer to the normative category of incorrectness, which defines a lack of compliance with an accepted norm. And it is precisely this category that proves particularly interesting when we conceive actions and “legal experiences” in the context of the scope theory of norms. In the case of legal phenomenology, the primacy of moral norms over legal norms is consistently assumed and highlighted. However, it turns out that the category of incorrectness – legal rather than ethical – allows us to resolve certain dilemmas that are primarily conceived as moral and that relate both to the category of evil and to transcendent values. Two such examples can be given. The first one concerns the violation or disrespect for human rights when proponents of such an attitude refer to the primacy of personal Freedom as a primordial value. The second example concerns the violation or disrespect for patient rights when, in the name of the patient’s well-being, considered to be a highest Good, they are permitted access to only part, but not all, of their medical records. In both cases, it is easier to resolve such dilemmas of decision and conduct by referring to the legal category of incorrectness, while it is more difficult to debate them in the context of morality and ethics, because there is an originary conflict of values and norms. These examples demonstrate that in some cases – as Paul Amselek has written – one may indicate a certain priority of legal norms over moral norms, although the context of the latter is absolutely indispensable: the context of what is good and what is evil.

Robert Grzywacz, Ignatianum University in Kraków, Poland

Criminal Innocence - A Phenomenological Reading of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*

Abstract: Certain contemporary works in forensic psychology and criminology (e.g. J. Shaw, *Making Evil: The Science Behind Humanity's Dark Side*, 2019), as well as in neurobiology and psychiatry (e.g. J. Fallon, *The Psychopath Inside*, 2013), are not only testimonies to the existential involvement of their authors in their research, but also consistently explore the threshold regions where ordinary everyday experience borders on the ominous spectre of pathology.

In his outline of Marc Richir's phenomenological project (Staudigl 2023, *Principia LXX*), M. Staudigl points to the reading of literature as an experience of the phenomenalisation of "wild primordiality", illustrated through Melville's *Moby Dick*. The choice is understandable, as Richir devoted an entire monograph to Melville (*Melville: Les assises du monde*, 2013). Beyond the compelling and in-depth interpretation of the symbolic intrigue of the metaphysical poem *Moby Dick*—which draws upon mythological threads of biblical prehistory—Richir's work offers no less significant insights into Melville's "literary testament": *Billy Budd*. The story of an innocent murderer, which calls into question simplified moral judgments and exposes the ambiguity of institutions guarding order, turns out, in essence, to be a phenomenological description of affectivity as event, in its emergence. Symbolic motifs characteristic of Melville's legacy (such as whiteness) intertwine here with the ambivalence of the moment of affective sublimity—at once attracting and terrifying—and with a founding violence that inverts the biblical myth of Cain and Abel, casting into the political sphere the thought of an impossible foundation rooted in innocence.

By confronting Richir's reading of Melville's *Billy Budd* with that proposed by A. Lipszyc, the study focuses on the transformations of human affectivity which—in the context of Richir's philosophy and his understanding of the concept of *Spaltung*—constitute the key to a phenomenological psychopathology and anthropology.

L'étrangeté du mal

Abstract: Si l'on considère le mal comme quelque chose «d'étranger», ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'il apparaît comme extérieur à moi-même mais aussi pour cette raison qu'il est très difficile de l'adapter à la dimension de la mienneté. C'est Jean Nabert qui a montré (*Essai sur le mal*) que le mal s'avère finalement «injustifiable», pas moyen de le réduire à la seule violation des normes morales que nous connaissons jusque-là et au moins dans ce sens il est incompréhensible. Ce genre de mal semble éclater les limites de mon expérience, il ne tient pas dans son cadre. Mais il ne s'agit pas ici seulement du mal que je subis directement, mais aussi du mal dont d'autres sont victimes et témoins. Je ne suis en aucun cas capable d'assimiler particulièrement l'expérience du mal extrême, celle qu'ont vécue Jean Améry (*Par-delà le crime et le châtement*), Filip Müller (*Trois ans dans une chambre à gaz d'Auschwitz*) ou bien Primo Levi (*Si c'est un homme*) en tant que prisonniers du camp de concentration et d'extermination d'Auschwitz. C'est exactement pour cette raison que Paul Ricoeur parle de la «crise insurmontable du témoignage» (*La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*). La question de savoir comment, d'une part, ne pas ignorer le mal et, d'autre part, lui faire face malgré son étrangeté reste ouverte.

Marek Jedliński, Faculty of Philosophy, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland

The war against Satan. Putin and Kirill's vision of the struggle against Ukraine and the LGBT+ community

Abstract: The war against Ukraine is treated by the Russian president and Patriarch Kirill as a cultural war against the anti-values of the Western world and against the so-called metaphysical evil. Kirill justifies the killing of civilians by referring to a higher goal, which is the fight against metaphysical evil, incarnated, in his opinion, by the LGBT+ community. The aim of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of Putin and Kirill's homophobic rhetoric. In this paper, I refer to Sara Ahmed's perspective on queer phenomenology. Ahmed's research method allows us to analyse the phenomena of hatred towards queer people. Referring to Freud's findings, it can be said that Kirill and Putin represent a case of obsession with queer people. Cyril and Putin persistently repeat their claims about evil, the worst embodiment of which is the LGBT+ community, especially homosexual men. In summary, the war with Ukraine is treated as a war against the alleged Satanism of the LGBT+ community.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Karolina Karbownik, Independent Researcher, Poland

The Liturgy of Darkness. Aesthetics of Religion as an Artistic Way in *Patriarkh's* Works

In my presentation, I aim to critically examine the language of artistic practices developed by the band *Patriarkh* (and its earlier incarnation known as *Batushka*). This practice, grounded in an overt play of good versus evil, draws extensively on Eastern Orthodox narrative frameworks. I intend to trace how religion is mobilized within the group's artistic activity, which encompasses the lyrics of songs constituting distinct liturgies as well as stage performances that stage these liturgies, saturated with a spiritual charge derived from the sacred and an ideological charge rooted in the aesthetics of black metal music.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Piotr Karpiński, The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Faculty of Philosophy, Poland

Evil and the Phenomenon of Forgiveness in the Moral Philosophy of Vladimir Jankélévitch

Abstract: A philosophy of evil may concern itself with its essence, its manifestations, or the practical question of how one is to confront evil, what stance one should adopt toward it, and, in its most maximalist form, how evil might ultimately be overcome. It is precisely on the ground of suffered evil that the possibility of forgiveness arises. The French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch devoted considerable attention to this theme. Although the philosophical classification of his thought is not straightforward – oscillating between a philosophy of reflection, an existential dialectic, and a psychologism – and although it broadly belongs to the domain of moral reflection, it nonetheless offers not only speculative analyses but also profound descriptions of lived experience. When combined with a concrete analysis of consciousness, Jankélévitch's project may even be regarded as a kind of moral phenomenology in the wider sense.

Jankélévitch develops his philosophy of forgiveness in the context of evil endured. The phenomenon of forgiveness itself has a rich and complex structure. It is always an event, it bears the character of a gift (of grace), and it concerns the relation to the other. Forgiveness is not a mere forgetting, not simply the effect of "time healing all wounds". Rather, it exhibits a phenomenological affinity with love, or even with the erotic phenomenon. Forgiveness does not arise from an attempt to understand evil, since evil is in itself always unintelligible. Forgiveness is excess. Jankélévitch's descriptions can fruitfully be compared with Jean-Luc Marion's notions of givenness and the saturated phenomenon, as well as with Paul Ricoeur's analyses of forgiveness, history, and memory.

Against the backdrop of Jankélévitch's accounts of forgiveness, one may also discern, almost in passing, a deeper truth concerning evil itself. Employing the categories of his metaphysics, Jankélévitch names evil an "organ-obstacle." Evil is both the "cause" of forgiveness and its impediment: it sets forgiveness into motion while simultaneously resisting it. The aim of forgiveness is always to overcome evil, to transform resentment into love, and ultimately to effect the transformation and salvation of the other person who has committed evil. Yet the question of the limits of evil – what is forgivable and what remains unforgivable – remains one of the most difficult and unsettling.

Branko Klun, Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Heidegger's Existential Analytic and the Question of Evil

Abstract: The title of this paper points to a dimension that is not only absent in Heidegger's existential analytic as developed in *Being and Time*, but also seems incompatible with its methodological framework. Heidegger deliberately distanced himself from traditional moral distinctions rooted in Western metaphysics, seeking instead a new explication of human "being" (in its temporal and verbal sense). His project aimed to free existential analysis not only from moral categories but also from the ontological presuppositions of the "metaphysics of substance." This methodological stance gave rise to critiques of *Being and Time* for its lack of ethics, or for fostering a problematic form of "decisionism." This paper argues that, despite such critiques, Heidegger's emphasis on finitude offers significant insights into the phenomenon of "involuntary evil" within human existence. At the same time, his refusal of an ethics transcending finitude and historical contingency leaves crucial dimensions of human existence underdeveloped. Specifically, two constitutive aspects of human being—embodiment and intersubjectivity—are largely omitted in Heidegger's existential analytic. Yet the problem of evil is inseparably linked to both: the vulnerability of bodily pleasure and suffering, and the responsibility for the embodied existence of others. Without integrating these dimensions, existential analysis remains methodologically incapable of addressing evil as a fundamental existential and ontological phenomenon.

Aleksander Kopka, Institute of Philosophy, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

Jacques Derrida and the Question of Forgiveness

Abstract: This paper reconstructs Jacques Derrida's argument regarding the question of the worst in the framework of the economy of violence as described in texts such as *Of Grammatology*, *Violence and Metaphysics*, *Faith and Knowledge* and *Rogues*. Within that context, it investigates multiple concepts of evil (in particular Kantian concept of radical evil introduced in *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*) and confronts it with the notion of forgiveness developed by Derrida in particular during his two-year seminar series given in 1998-1999. Finally, it argues that Derrida's insistence on the unconditionality of forgiveness, as one of his hyper-ethical postulations, should be viewed as a critical response to the threat of radicality of evil and a challenge to the political and ethical inertia.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Magdalena Kozak, Ignatianum University in Krakow, Poland

La destruction comme affirmation de la liberté - une lecture phénoménologique de *Caligula* d'Albert Camus

Abstract: Pour le protagoniste de la pièce *Caligula*, l'expérience de la mort de sa sœur et amante, Drusilla, constitue une expérience-limite (selon K. Jaspers), qui révèle à l'empereur l'absurdité de la vie. Cela déclenche en lui un sentiment extrême d'injustice et engendre une révolte totale, qui conduit finalement l'empereur à la catastrophe. L'homme est seul face au monde, mais aussi face à sa propre conscience.

L'objectif de ma présentation sera de montrer non seulement les thèmes existentiels présents dans la pièce, mais aussi de les interpréter dans une perspective phénoménologique: en quoi consiste la suspension phénoménologique des jugements sur le monde opérée par Caligula? Comment le monde se révèle-t-il à nouveau, en l'absence de normes, de règles et de valeurs établies? De quelle manière, après la perte de son aimée, l'empereur fait-il l'expérience du monde et de son absurdité?

Caligula découvre que le monde n'est que le reflet de la conscience humaine. Il n'existe pas de vérité objective, car chaque vérité est une interprétation. Par quel chemin la subjectivité de la connaissance et le phénomène du pouvoir poussé à l'extrême deviennent-ils une forme de destruction pour Caligula? Et enfin: pourquoi le phénomène de la mort devient-il une expérience du néant?

Polish Phenomenological Association

Beata Król, University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin, Poland

The evil face of education - the links between schooling and genocide

Abstract: 20th century is a century of fast development of public schooling observed worldwide, that allowed many people the access to knowledge on previously unimaginable level. 20th century is also the century of genocide, the organised mass crime, that was not possible in the era before modernity, as it implemented technological inventions. Genocides were often state-organised, mass extermination campaigns that used the existing public institutions to facilitate the killing. Schools were often the starting point, where the people were taught to hate their neighbours at the very young age. These were the schools, where the first step in the ladder of genocide was taken: the classification, the division of the society into 'us and them'. It was Jane Elliot, who proved how easily and how quickly 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' can be created in the school environment and beyond. The significant role of education in the Third Reich is an undeniable fact. Hitler understood the importance of schools for politics and announced his plans for their transformation in *Mein Kampf* years before his party won the elections. Public burning of books and militarisation of schools brainwashed the society and reversed the traditional values. But after the Holocaust and Porajmos also in Rwanda education was important in preparation of genocide of 1994. Education can have its negative face, that is not as frequently explored as the positive face. It seems that the threat that the education might facilitate atrocities is still there and should be acknowledged by all for whom education is important.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Andrzej Leder, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences

You Cannot Contain Violence...

Plenary Lecture

Abstract: We need to delve deeper into what this belief is, the belief that violence can be contained within some framework, separated, and only observed how it rages somewhere, behind a wall, or abroad, or outside the windows of an apartment building, when someone is beaten or raped in the street... Such a belief, the belief in the delimitation of violence is only possible when a person, people, some part of them, terminates the “community agreement” their shared with another person, other people, some other part of society. They decline to sense the common fate as common.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Michal Lipták, Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences

Phenomenological Theodicy? Husserl's Phenomenological Theology and the Problem of Evil

Abstract: As demonstrated in pioneering studies by Stephen Laycock and James Hart, Husserl's phenomenology had a peculiar religious undercurrent, despite God being "bracketed" most of the time in his texts. Remarks on God and religion were scattered, for example, in *Ideen I*, *Hua XV* or *Kaizo* articles (*Hua XXVII*). With publication of *Hua XLII* (containing most of convolute A V 21), however, Husserl's writings on philosophical theology became widely available. For Husserl, the idea of God is operative in the very limit problems of phenomenology: the very possibility of hyletic flow on one hand, and teleological establishment of transcendental community as condition of possibility of intersubjectivity on the other. These writings thus concern, for example, questions of creation [*die Schöpfung*] and fate [*das Schicksal*].

The term *Theodizee* appears in two Husserl's manuscripts: one is from 1916 and theodicy is there linked to a universal science, second one is from 1923 and theodicy, together with cosmodycy [*Kosmodizee*], are linked to progressive ethical socialization [*fortschreitenden ethischen Sozialisierung*]. Husserl at these points confronts the question how to establish meaning in meaninglessness, but the use of the word theodicy points to the fact that he likewise confronts the question of the evil [*das Böse*] that is either natural (such as illness, or death as unavoidable evil) or man-made (such as war). Husserl's suggested response to this question lies in the idea of infinitely enduring and ever-improving ethical transcendental community which sustains the world and strive towards universal consciousness that can even "love the evil as the mean for the good" [*Mittel für das Gute*]. For Husserl, phenomenology as a project of achieving human self-understanding is essential to such striving.

Husserl's suggestions, however, remain underdeveloped. In my contribution, I intend to outline Husserl's "phenomenological theodicy" in a more systematic manner, showing how it is grounded in "proper" Husserlian phenomenology. Moreover, I intend to investigate whether even the current phenomenological self-understanding of its role in the world, vis-à-vis sciences or even politics, is still implicitly tied to such "theodicy". Therefore, investigation of Husserl's phenomenological theology can be revealing with regard to the phenomenological project as such.

Adam Lipszyc, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences

In the Devil's Bath: Evil as the Promise of Sovereignty

Plenary Lecture

Abstract: The paper will center upon the 2024 period/horror film *Des Teufels Bad*, directed by Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala. The film, set in the 18th century rural Austria, is based on historical research which has revealed a number of cases in which women in despair – afraid of eternal condemnation as the punishment for suicide – murdered children and turned themselves in, in order to be sentenced to death. By referring to Freud on helplessness, Benjamin on violence, Canetti on power and Butler on precarity, the paper will present the film as an incisive study of stifling entrapment in a patriarchal form of life which can be escaped only by a criminal act which, however, is only a catastrophic response to the way power administers life, promising to its subjects the existence of the inaccessible, but allegedly real locus of paternal sovereignty. On the basis of this analysis, more general conclusions will be drawn concerning the nature of evil as the false but infinitely seductive promise of sovereignty, of the position of mastery and self-mastery that would enable us to transcend the human condition of helplessness and precarity.

Jozef Majernik, Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences

Nietzsche's revaluation of evil between *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* and the *Genealogy of Morality*

Abstract: Nietzsche's critique of the concept of "evil" (*das Böse*) in the *Genealogy of Morality* (*GM*) is rightly famous. Less well-known is that he undertook his first critique of this fundamental moral concept already 11 years earlier in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (*WB*), the last of his *Untimely Considerations*. The purpose of this paper is to compare these two revaluations of "evil" and so to clarify the goal at which they both aim.

We find Nietzsche's first critique of "evil" in the final chapter of *WB*; it forms the culmination of this essay, and thereby of the *Untimely Considerations* as a whole. Here he writes about the free human beings of the future that they will know "that to be honest, even in evil, is better than to lose oneself in the morality of tradition; that the free man can be good or evil but the unfree man is a disgrace to nature and is excluded from both heavenly and earthly solace; finally, that he who wants to become free has to become so through his own actions and that freedom falls into no one's lap like a miraculous gift". This amounts to a rejection of the current (post-)Christian moral standards of "good" and "evil" for the sake of authenticity, or following one's natural inclinations and growth wherever they may lead us. The new moral standard is to be the pursuit of one's own genius. This means returning morality to nature and the concomitant rejection of the merely conventional morality of contemporary Europe.

This line of argument was shelved after Nietzsche abandoned the project of the *Untimely Considerations*. Its new form appears in *Beyond Good and Evil* § 260, according to which there are two basic types of morality: "master morality" with its basic distinction "good – bad" and "slave morality" with the distinction "good – evil". This argument is then further developed in *GM* I. Whereas master morality is fundamentally active – an affirmation of the masters' own existence – slave morality is *reactive*, a rejection of the "evil enemy's" existence. In this it crucially depends on God as the transcendent legislator of moral standards. This critique extends also to other modern forms of morality despite their ostensibly secular character.

I shall argue that the fundamental point of Nietzsche's critique of "evil" is in both cases the renaturalization of morality – i.e., reconceiving morality so that the goal at which it aims, its "good", coincides with genuine human excellence as it manifests itself in the figure of the philosopher. This renaturalization is at the same time a return to the *Greek* understanding of morality: the Greek word for virtue, *arete*, is derived from *aristos*, "best"; Greek "virtue" thus literally means "bestness" or "excellence" (cf. Plato, *Republic* 335b–e). Nietzsche's main objection to "evil" thus is its unnatural or anti-natural character, and his critique of it aims to restore the natural human excellence as the standard of goodness.

Trio des chantres du Mal

Plenary Lecture

Abstract: Il existe des chantres du mal parmi les métaphysiciens. De tout leur orchestre, je voudrais souligner un *trio*, sachant que parmi les seuls modernes on pourrait créer un *ensemble* somptueux. Dans de nombreux endroits Leopardi prêche la même chose que Sade, et Cioran, plus souvent qu'il ne l'admet, s'inspire de Leopardi. Il s'agit d'*unisono* qui préserve d'ailleurs la spécificité des auteurs souverains. Les thèmes communs à MdS et à GL: la conviction de l'état énigmatique de l'homme dans le monde et la critique sarcastique de l'anthropologie sublime qui revendique hardiment son rôle; la vision de la nature comme indifférente ou cruelle envers ses créatures; la croyance à l'infinité du désir humain, dont l'expression pratique et finalement apocalyptique est l'insatiabilité ou la luxure. Tous deux discutent passionnément de la vertu et du vice, voyant la première comme un emblème de l'hypocrisie ou un fantôme martyrologique et le second comme un principe ontologique. Leur matérialisme et leur pessimisme culminent dans un monisme sombre, à savoir dans une explication du monde qui expose ses trois ingrédients tous aussi infernaux: début, durée et fin. „La métaphysique noire” de Leopardi correspond à la théologie scélérate de Saint-Fond qui croit en Dieu et en l'immortalité comme des sujets liés par essence au mal. Cependant, si Sade défend fermement la thèse du mal structurel de la réalité, Leopardi déraile un peu. Il est vrai que dans sa polémique avec Rousseau il se comporte de manière décisive: ce n'est pas l'homme qui infecte la nature innocente, mais c'est la nature elle-même qui est marquée par un défaut essentiel (Cioran considère ce stigmate comme indissociable du *fiat* de Dieu ou comme une fonction du mouvement essentiellement démoniaque et du temps dérivé). Mais contrairement à Sade, qui réduit tout à un jeu de forces et affirme d'*a priori* le vainqueur, Leopardi va parfois sympathiser avec l'homme, l'héroïser ou légitimer sa rébellion. Un besoin de se pencher au-delà du nihilisme de l'obscurité omniprésente et de la symbiose avec Thanatos qu'elle impose serait représenté par l'image poétique de la détermination du genêt de fleurir sur la pente aride du Vésuve; et aussi par l'attitude de Tristan, l'un des héros des *Petites œuvres morales*, solidement façonnée à une réflexion existentielle: non seulement il voit clairement la tragédie du destin humain, sans plus chercher à l'exorciser ou à le justifier de quelque façon que ce soit, mais l'abandon même des illusions ne lui cause aucune frustration; il s'ouvre à la vérité du «désert de la vie» et à la vérité de la mort, n'ayant comme garantie que sa propre conscience aiguë et sa rébellion à la fois monumentale et apaisée. Cioran est aussi dialectique et ambivalent que Leopardi. D'une part, il reconnaît l'échec irréversible de l'homme, inscrit dans son code génétique et articulé, originairement et de façon inégalée, dans le *Livre de la Genèse*: l'homme est réellement et pratiquement immergé dans le mal, le paradis n'étant qu'un souvenir et un fantôme; non seulement il n'existe que pour mourir, mais il multiplie aussi l'infamie dans le monde, ce qui est une conséquence de son ressentiment et de son désespoir; il se réalise dans un mode de progrès trompeur et destructeur, et attend l'inatteignable. D'autre part, Cioran observe l'impasse comme le destin de l'homme et il reconnaît soigneusement toute sa tragédie; en voyant l'homme aussi comme une victime, un participant à un massacre transhistorique, il le traite, par l'intermédiaire de sa propre vivisection, avec compréhension et compassion. Il affirme, peut-être pas de manière totalement innovante, mais avec une verve et une éloquence sans précédent, la catastrophe humaine primordiale; résultant du fait d'être doté de conscience, qui, avec toutes ses distinctions, est aussi inévitablement un corrélat du mal (comme le revers de l'inconscience qui rend, la seule, le paradis accessible).

“I felt I was becoming a vegetable” - Torture as an Example of Evil Institutions in the Phenomenological Perspective

Abstract: My talk is planned as a continuation of last year’s presentation. In the previous edition, following Staudigl’s phenomenology of violence, I sought to show the impact of torture on the breakdown of the victim’s subjectivity. I focused on the first-person experience of those subjected to torture. In this year’s edition, I would like to shift the perspective and rethink the problem of torture from the standpoint of institutions, in dialogue with the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and Jean Améry.

By evil institutions I mean all social structures that introduce evil at the institutional level. Evil will be understood here in terms of action directed at the destruction of the Other’s subjectivity. In the presentation, I will address the following questions:

1. How can evil be defined, and how does this category differ from wrongdoing?
2. Can the category of evil be applied to institutions? Does this somehow change the nature of evil?
3. Can torture be recognized as an example of an evil institution?
4. Does recognizing torture as an evil institution constitute a sufficient argument for rejecting the possibility of justifying torture?

The first three issues are descriptive in nature and will focus on analyzing the concepts of “evil,” “institutions,” and “torture” in such a way as to bring out their essential features. Then, in the final question, I will move to a normative analysis, engaging with the debate over positions that allow torture as the lesser evil.

The central hypothesis is that torture, recognized as an example of an evil institution (alongside slavery, for instance), rests on dehumanization and radical objectification not only of the victim (as demonstrated in last year’s presentation) but also of the perpetrator. It produces a diluted sense of responsibility, in which the person carrying out the act of violence becomes a representative of a broader system of power.

Monika Murawska, Faculty of Media Art, Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw

Evil: Shadows of Indifference. The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Art

Abstract: My presentation will focus on evil as indifference and, consequently, as a shadow of indifference within the context of Levinas' philosophy on art. I will not discuss evil in the context of phenomenology. I will follow two paths here—I will show Levinas' fascination with literature and describe Levinas' lesser-known texts on art, where it is not a shadow, but an obliteration, a darkening that allows the way to good to be opened. Therefore, I will be interested in non-evil as a correlate of art and non-indifference, and the good sensitivity that can ultimately be found in art.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Artur Nyczak, Independent Researcher, Poland

Byung-Chul Han and Gianni Vattimo on the Obscurity of Evil in the Transparent Society

Abstract: The paper examines the obscure and insidious character of evil in contemporary late-capitalist Western societies, drawing on the thought of two theorists of the society of transparency: Byung-Chul Han and Gianni Vattimo.

It argues that with the end of metaphysics, the traditional conception of “great” evil as a transcendent force, moral absolute, or essential property loses validity. What becomes necessary instead is a “weak” notion of evil, understood as the effect of human practices and human-made social and economic structures. This shift is not only theoretical but also practical, since the “weak” concept of evil proves better suited to diagnosing and characterizing the manifestations of evil in contemporary reality.

Unlike obvious and easily perceptible evil, such as war or overt violence, the paper focuses on more elusive evil embedded in the everyday, routine judgments and behaviors. It seeks to demonstrate that such evil is potentially more dangerous because it is harder to notice, reflect upon, and counteract, while it remains capable of “strong” consequences, from large-scale harm to radical transformation of the human condition.

The point of departure is Hannah Arendt’s thesis on the banality of evil, which shifts attention from metaphysical absolutes to everyday practices of conformism, thoughtlessness, and the diminishment of the faculty of judgment. I argue that Han and Vattimo, in different ways, extend Arendt’s post-metaphysical approach to evil in their diagnoses of contemporary societies.

Han highlights the latent and nearly invisible operations of evil in the society of transparency, where the disappearance of negativity and the excess of positivity foster destructive compulsions toward optimization, self-expression, and achievement. Vattimo, by contrast, conceptualizes evil as “evil that is not,” residues of metaphysics that emerge within interpretative and historical structures, persisting in forms of exclusion and symbolic domination.

The paper contributes by offering a comparative reading of their accounts and by showing their limits as well as their mutual correctives. For Han, evil arises from the erosion of negativity, while for Vattimo it is negativity itself, obstructing freedom and historical openness. Han situates evil in new capitalist structures of positivity; Vattimo locates it in the lingering remains of metaphysics. Each perspective, however, risks one-sidedness: Han may fall into metaphysical nostalgia for a “true” negativity, while Vattimo may underestimate the subtler, less visible forms of evil inscribed in a transparent society. I propose that their views, once critically adjusted in light of one another, can be reconciled and made complementary, offering a fuller picture of evil in contemporary transparent, global society.

Finally, the paper evaluates their practical strategies for resistance against obscure evil. It identifies insufficiency in Han’s thought in this respect, as he seems to yield to a mood of resignation, proposing individual withdrawal from optimization regimes. By contrast, Vattimo’s hermeneutics seems more useful, calling for an attitude of ethical engagement within the community of interpreters and for political activism aimed at reducing evil.

Piotr Pasterczyk, Faculty of Philosophy, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Evil as resentment? Understanding of Evil in Relation to Nietzsche's Concept of Slave Morality

Abstract: This paper discusses Nietzsche's concept of resentment as the source of evil in the specific sense of suffering and unwanted effort. While, according to Nietzsche, morality of masters values good in the form of strength and virtue, morality of slaves emphasizes evil as suffering that forces unwanted effort and struggle. For people with slave morality, good is relief from suffering and peace, and specific virtues are attitudes such as compassion, humility, and love. The following paper is a critique of the concept of evil as resentment, because such an understanding relativizes the phenomenon of evil as evil and seems to be internally inconsistent within the framework of Nietzsche's argument in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and other writings. By defining slave morality as Christian morality based on resentment, Nietzsche makes a logical error of *pars pro toto*, because he himself admits that Jesus of Nazareth was not subject to resentment. The discussion of resentment as the source of evil reveals Nietzsche's attitude towards historical Christianity, because it is in the practice of Christian life that attitudes such as compassion, humility, and love find their greatest meaning. However, in the writings of the New Testament, we also find an invitation to confrontation and struggle, even at the cost of losing one's life, which makes the identification of Christian morality with resentment inconsistent. It seems that the solution to this dilemma lies in the distinction between historical Christianity and its source in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Historical Christianity became a religious system performing social functions such as curbing aggressive and violent attitudes and introducing peace and social order, for which obedience and humility are useful tools. However, the situation is different with the original message of Jesus Christ, who was also a true Christian for Nietzsche himself because he possessed strength and virtue which, like Spartan warriors, encourage unyielding struggle rather than surrendering in the face of danger.

Mirosław Pęczak, Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw, Poland

Evil as a Theme in Popular Culture Texts

Abstract: In this presentation, I will focus on the diverse nature of the theme of evil in popular culture. I will therefore consider condemned evil, evil that constitutes an object of fascination and a source of fear, conscious and unconscious evil, which underlies the human condition and manifests itself momentarily. The main area of analysis will be film, music, and literature. The dynamics of evil's representation are important: one can identify the dominance of specific trends in literature or film – at a certain point in contemporary horror, for example, evil triumphs, and apocalyptic and satanic motifs are increasingly used. The thesis of the presentation: the theme of evil in popular culture texts, including evil triumphs, is increasingly expansive and is linked to trends observable in social media and tabloid culture.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Marcin Rebes, Department of European Philosophy, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland

The phenomenology of dialogical evil seen through the prism of ethical and aesthetic experience

Abstract: Hannah Arendt approaches the phenomenon of evil of the 20th century through the prism of its banality. The 'banality of evil' lies in the fact that it became a part of daily routine in public sphere. And yet the 20th century was a century of cruel wars that sought to dehumanise people by depriving them of moral principles and critical thinking. Evil lost its moral dimension and became aesthetical phenomenon. In this sense, it led to understanding evil through the prism of conformity and opportunism. Something is good because it is useful. Evil became something external that is separated from me, from my 'I'. The banality of evil is the rejection of the idea that I can be the perpetrator of evil by dehumanizing others. Evil in the sense of usefulness means that I also treat another person as someone who is instrumental to me. I admire 'them', but I do not offer 'them' anything of myself. In contrast to evil understood in an aesthetic sense, there is dialogical evil, resulting from the breaking of ties with another. In both cases, evil is not a fixed and static being, but something that happens, and being constituted as a result of our thinking and our actions. Evil manifests itself during our actions and is relational in nature. It concerns a specific person, and the perpetrator is a specific person. The philosophy of dialogue that emerged in the 1920s addresses the moral crisis and the reduction of values to aesthetic categories. The philosophies of Buber and Levinas reverse the perspective by focusing on responsibility for the other. It is precisely this responsibility that makes evil more radical and more dramatic, because it causes harm to another person. The other loses the meaning of their own existence. The phenomenon of evil is a fleetingness that destroys bonds and relationships between people. In my contribution, I am diving into intend the problem of evil that occurs in social interactions. Thus, the evil is considered as destructive to existence, but it is not considered an autonomous being. Everyone wants their life to be meaningful. Betrayal destroys relationships as well as self-esteem. How can we strengthen ethical bonds in an aestheticized world? it could achieve through the category of the senses. They form the outer layer that separates us from others, from the world, and at the same time makes it possible to stimulate our senses. Emmanuel Lévinas uses the concept of skin, which, being a part of us, allows us to know what is different from us. Touch, taste, hearing, sight – through them, the aesthetic obliges and invites us into relationships. The aesthetic experience carries within it a deep relationship that invites us to offer ourselves to others. Understood in this way, experience ceases to be a work of art and becomes a sacrifice, an offering, giving it meaning by grounding it in a good that is spontaneous and binding. Responding to another person's call, aesthetic experience is transformed into ethical sacrifice.

Claude Romano, Paris-Sorbonne University, France; Australian Catholic University, Australia

The Issue of Evil in Faulkner: a Phenomenological Perspective

Keynote Lecture

Faulkner is a writer whose essential vocation was to reveal without explaining or judging and, by revealing, to make us understand, as far as this is possible. The aim of his writing is, through characters and situations, to return to the things themselves, to show the world in the process of being born before our eyes and thus to immerse us in it. Hence its thoroughly phenomenological dimension. The philosopher, in turn, can explore, read, and understand this fictional universe. Faulkner's novels and characters are thus taken up in the light of the philosopher's questioning, who offers an outline for the inquiry that the literary work intimates regarding time and space, memory and recollection, mourning and melancholy, selfhood and the mask, nature and the sensory, existence and life.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Jean-Michel Salanskis, Institute of Philosophical Research, Paris Nanterre University

Indifference, evil, and being

Keynote Lecture (online)

Abstract: I would like to reflect on the distance between indifference and malice. We often equate evil with indifference. Tolerating the suffering of others would already be evil (or even not suffering when others suffer). Sometimes, however, we distinguish between indifference and actual malice: for us, evil corresponds to cruelty, a case where freedom chooses the suffering of others and, perhaps, delights in it.

Is there also such a thing as “ontological evil”? That is, a principle acting within being, embodied in a force that explains the prevalence of bad behavior in humans?

I would like to reflect on this twofold question by reading a few authors who are important to me in this regard, following the suggestions given by Cezary Wodzinski in *Shadows and Lights of Evil*: Kant, Levinas, and Simone Weil, in principle.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Marie Antonios Sassine, Dominican University College, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Heretical Views of Evil: Jan Patočka and Hannah Arendt

Abstract: Jan Patočka and Hannah Arendt offer distinct yet overlapping perspectives on evil, shaped by their respective phenomenological and political-philosophical frameworks. They both lived through dark times that directly affected the trajectory of their lives and work. Their reflections are, therefore, informed and made richer by deeply personal and meditated experience. While both address evil in the context of totalitarianism and human responsibility, their approaches differ in focus, methodology, and conceptual emphasis.

Patočka approaches evil through a phenomenological lens, influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, with a focus on human existence and the “natural world” (*Lebenswelt*). Evil is understood as a disruption of the three movements of human life—reception, reproduction, and transcendence—particularly when freedom and the “care for the soul” are suppressed. In *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Patočka sees evil as tied to the “loss of meaning” in modern techno-scientific civilization and totalitarian regimes that enforce ideological closure, stifling the openness to truth and questioning. Evil is a lived experience, not a metaphysical substance, emerging when humans fail to confront the *problematicity* of existence. Arendt’s concept of the “banality of evil,” developed through her observation of Adolf Eichmann’s trial, posits that evil can arise from thoughtlessness, conformity, and a failure to exercise critical judgment, rather than from diabolical intent. Eichmann’s bureaucratic obedience exemplified how ordinary individuals perpetuate evil by following orders without questioning. She also hints that evil deeds spring from some ‘exaggeration’ of self-interest that far exceeds utilitarian ends.

This paper will explore areas of convergence and difference to see how they might help us to think about the phenomenon of evil in a way that is relevant to today’s world, in a way that might help us see how we may think about events that defy reasonable understanding and how we may react to them and even impede them.

Piotr Schollenberger, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Warsaw, Poland

Of Nature's Evil. Merleau-Ponty, Schelling and Bataille on experience of evil

Abstract: This paper investigates the intersections between Georges Bataille's reflections on evil in *Literature and Evil* (1957) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature, as articulated in *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* (1956-1960). The dialogue is further enriched by engaging with Friedrich Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), a text that profoundly shapes Merleau-Ponty's rethinking of nature and provides a bridge between Romantic *Naturphilosophie* and twentieth-century phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty, in his lectures, returns to Schelling's speculative philosophy of nature to dismantle mechanistic and dualistic paradigms. Schelling had already emphasized that nature is not passive substance but a dynamic productivity (*natura naturans*), an abyssal ground in which freedom and necessity are inseparably entwined. In the *Freedom* essay, Schelling describes nature as containing a "dark ground" (*dunkler Grund*) that makes both good and evil possible: evil is not mere privation but an active force rooted in the very dynamism of being. Merleau-Ponty inherits this vision and radicalizes it phenomenologically, conceiving of nature as "wild being" (*être sauvage*) or the "flesh of the world." Nature is thus not an object for consciousness but the pre-reflective matrix in which subject and object, self and other, intertwine. For Bataille, evil is not reducible to a moral defect or a privation of the good. Rather, it names a zone of transgression where sacrifice, eroticism, waste, and crime rupture the order of utility and open onto sovereignty. In this sense, evil acquires a paradoxical "sovereign value," which challenges the instrumental logic of work, production, and moral conformity. Literature, guilty rather than innocent, embodies this confrontation with evil and becomes the privileged medium of "intense communication" — a form of hypermoral relation grounded in complicity and exposure to what exceeds ordinary moral categories. Bataille thus reframes evil as a pathway toward community and ecstatic disclosure, rather than as sheer negation.

Placed in this triadic constellation, Bataille's evil and Merleau-Ponty's nature can be read alongside Schelling's ground of freedom. All three thinkers expose the limits of rational mastery by turning to dimensions of existence that are excessive, opaque, and generative. Bataille's notion of a sovereign expenditure that shatters utilitarian order resonates with Schelling's claim that freedom must include the possibility of evil, since it arises from a primordial ground beyond moral dichotomies. Merleau-Ponty, drawing explicitly on Schelling, finds in this "dark ground" an ontological depth where life, spirit, and materiality are interwoven, a depth that precedes human intentionality. For Bataille, evil grounds an ethics of hypermoral communication, demanding fidelity to the excess that binds individuals together. For Merleau-Ponty, nature as flesh grounds an ontological ethics of intercorporeality: responsibility emerges from our shared immersion in the same elemental tissue of being. For Schelling, the ground of freedom reveals that both good and evil flow from the same productive source, underscoring that moral life is inseparable from our rootedness in the abyss of nature.

Bringing these strands together, the paper argues that Bataille's scandal of evil, Merleau-Ponty's wild nature, and Schelling's dark ground are variations on a shared theme: each insists that community, morality, and freedom can only be understood through engagement with what exceeds order, disrupts binaries, and reveals the generative depth of being. In their convergence, we are invited to reconceive evil and nature not as opposites of the good or of culture, but as necessary figures of the excessive, the transgressive, and the ontologically primordial.

Andrzej Słowikowski, Institute of Philosophy, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

Evil in an Existential Perspective

Abstract: In my presentation I will seek to grasp and articulate the specificity of evil as approached from an existential perspective. My thesis is that, despite significant differences in content and conceptual vocabulary among the various existential accounts, at a structural level one can discern a convergent way of understanding the problem of evil that they reveal. For existential philosophers, evil is not a metaphysical phenomenon in the classical sense, namely, a privation of the good. Neither is it simply a description of the moral profile of the human being, nor a description of the condition of a given social system. Rather, evil appears as a phenomenon originally bound up with the manner in which the human being relates both to the real world in which they live and to the world of ideals from which they draw inspiration for action. It is a spiritual force that manifests itself through human actions and in relation to human existence. Evil is thus considered not so much as an objective element of the world (physical or natural evil), but rather as a phenomenon of which the individual human being is both the author and the recipient in a specific existential situation. My task will be an attempt to identify this general, existential structure of the emergence of evil in the human world, and to show how it is articulated in selected existential accounts—from Kierkegaard, through Heidegger, to Levinas.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Evil - Between Impossibility and the Inability (of Doing It Otherwise)

Abstract: I assume that committing evil is always the accomplishment of the impossible. It's either an escalation, that is, a transgression of moderation and normal behavioral boundaries, or something beyond the pale, incomprehensible, and unimaginable. Taking the latter into account in particular, the fact of evil is scandalous (outside the ethical-normative order) and incomprehensible (outside the symbolic-intelligible order). Following Scheler, it can only be committed by demonstrating spiritual blindness (*geistige Blindheit*). In line with this belief, we will reinterpret Augustine's thesis: there is no evil; evil is a lack. Evil belongs to a different order, or rather, to the fact of lack of order, lack of moderation, and lack of restraint. While evil is banal, or, as Arendt describes, is performed in broad daylight as an everyday act, it is not fundamentally perceived as evil. It reveals its nature only through shock, revealing itself as a transgression, and thus an exception and something not considered a normal possibility.

If humanity can be treated as a nature stretching toward its points of infinity, then evil is the pole toward which man reaches as his furthest possibility. In this being toward... of man, evil is a goal that fascinates, providing a sense of power, authority, and igniting the imagination. Its opposite is obedience, that is, active openness in listening to the words that set boundaries for things and actions and adhering to them, establishing modesty (Luther's "Here *I stand*, I cannot do otherwise"). Inaction and impossibility are here synonyms for letting go (*gelassenheit*) of forcing one's will and phantasm in favor of mindfulness, being in touch, and focusing on what demands presence and existence. In this paper, I will explore the classical distinction between non-existence and existence as a domain of evil and goodness, based on the phenomenologically motivated conceptualization of impossibility and obedience.

Subjectivité - la première victime du mal selon Jean-Luc Marion

Abstract: Selon Marion, l'auto-anéantissement de la subjectivité – l'infini et l'interminable – constitue le triomphe ultime, logique et phénoménologique, du mal. Le sujet est d'abord emprisonné dans la subjectivité de la souffrance, devenant une sorte de monade « sans portes ni fenêtres » par sa réduction à un sujet souffrant. Ensuite, la subjectivité enfermée dans la souffrance désire se libérer du mal qu'elle expérimente, mais elle le fait spontanément en approfondissant seulement sa dévastation : elle anéantit sa propre subjectivité au nom de sa libération du mal. Cela conduit la subjectivité à la décision dramatique du suicide, qui provoque l'anéantissement de la source de la souffrance du sujet – c'est-à-dire l'anéantissement de la subjectivité elle-même. Le suicide est donc pour Marion le triomphe de la logique du mal et sa figure terminale.

Le sujet auto-anéanti s'emprisonne dans les limites de sa propre subjectivité, se faisant perdre la possibilité de toute distance nécessaire à la relation. Le sujet provoque donc son propre enfermement dans une solitude absolue. La logique du mal conduit à l'anéantissement de la subjectivité et, au lieu de la cohérence promise du sujet, elle offre son anéantissement. Ainsi, la subjectivité est toujours la première victime du mal, bien qu'elle ne cesse jamais d'en être également le témoin et l'auteur.

Mon analyse se focalise sur la description du phénomène du mal dans la relation spécifique que le sujet entretient avec lui-même. Traditionnellement, en effet, le mal est saisi à travers les relations interpersonnelles, qu'elles soient envisagées sous un angle moral, ontologique ou théologique. L'essai de Marion dans *Prolégomènes à la charité* nous rappelle avec force que le phénomène du mal affecte et blesse en premier lieu, et le plus profondément, la subjectivité elle-même.

Aleksander Jan Tyszkiewicz, Ignatianum University in Krakow, Poland

Death and Unforgivable Evil as Limits of Experience in the Thought of Vladimir Jankélévitch

Abstract: Vladimir Jankélévitch's philosophy can be situated at the intersection of phenomenology, ethics, and existential reflection on what is liminal, elusive, and resistant to conceptualization. Two of his key texts – *La Mort* and *Le Pardon* – represent attempts to grapple with that which radically resists both experience and language: death and absolute evil. Both death and unforgivable evil function in Jankélévitch's thought as limit-phenomena: they point to the end of existence and the end of ethics, while at the same time shaping the way in which human beings understand themselves and their place in the world.

In *La Mort*, Jankélévitch analyses death as a paradoxical "impossible experience". Death is always present as certainty and as horizon, and yet always deferred in time: it always comes "too early" or "too late", never exactly "now". It cannot be experienced in the perfect tense, for from the perspective of the individual, the moment of death is inaccessible to consciousness. This makes death not only a limit-phenomenon but also impossible to live through in the phenomenological sense. Nevertheless, the awareness of one's own death constitutes the existential experience of finitude, within which lies the drama of life as that which inexorably moves toward its end.

Conversely, *Le Pardon* takes up the question of evil and forgiveness, and particularly the problem of the "unforgivable". For Jankélévitch, forgiveness is a fundamental ethical possibility, an act that is not based on calculations of guilt and merit but on gratuitousness and grace. However, in the face of absolute evil—such as the crimes of Nazism—forgiveness proves to be impossible. In this sense, Jankélévitch speaks of the "never" of forgiveness: an ethical limit, the crossing of which would amount to a betrayal of the memory of the victims.

The unforgivable is thus not simply the absence of forgiveness, but rather it constitutes a space in which ethics must stop before the scandal of radical evil.

Both phenomena – death and forgiveness, or more precisely the impossibility of forgiveness – meet on common ground. Death as well as absolute evil point to limit-experiences that exceed the capacities of reason, language, or phenomenological description. Death undermines the very possibility of living through experience, while the unforgivable undermines the very possibility of an ethical response. And yet both phenomena possess profound existential and ethical significance. This is so because the awareness of death shapes our understanding of finitude and of the meaning of life, while the awareness of the unforgivable safeguards the gravity of evil, framed here as a form of justice toward the victims.

This presentation will seek to show how Jankélévitch, beginning from phenomenological intuitions, extends them toward a philosophy of limits – that is, a philosophy of what is inexpressible, inconceivable, and "impossible". The analysis of *La Mort* and *Le Pardon* will highlight the surprising convergence of two seemingly distinct problems – death and evil – which intersect within a single structure of liminality. In this perspective, Jankélévitch's thought emerges as a testimony to the paradoxes of the impossibility of coming to terms either with death or with evil, and at the same time as an affirmation of the duty of memory, vigilance, and responsibility before that which transcends the possibilities of human experience.

Cezary Woźniak, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland

Evil is whatever distracts. Kafka and the Question of Evil

Abstract: Many of Kafka's works are based on the structure of guilt-punishment-law. Their characters allegedly or actually commit transgressions against the law, which evokes a sense of guilt. This constellation of guilt, punishment and law present in Kafka's work has been widely interpreted (Adorno, Benjamin, Arendt, Bloom, Deleuze & Guattari, Calasso, Derrida, Agamben, Scholem). From this constellation also emerges a certain vision of man as the victim and the related question of the nature of evil.

Kafka addressed evil directly several times (*Eight Notebooks, Aphorisms from Zürau, On*), but these statements are aphoristic in nature, also often in the form of a parable or paradox, and their ambiguous meaning seems difficult to grasp, which likely requires not only relating them to Kafka's world as a whole but also to a broader context, including theology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. Max Brod saw Kafka's aphorisms as a record of his worldview, as well as a reflection of his religious views. Kafka himself described the creation of these notes as constructive destruction (*aufbauende Zerstörung*) carried out on himself, which can also be understood as a form of critical introspection, dealing with the questions of good and evil, alienation and redemption, death and paradise. These notes can also be viewed as attempts to express the phenomenon of evil in the form of linguistic experiments at the limits of language.

This paper is an attempt to consider what Kafka essentially says about the evil and what significance it might have for us today.

Polish Phenomenological Association

Pourquoi l'Autre triomphe-t-il du mal? Les sources bibliques de la résolution du problème du mal chez Lévinas

Abstract: Pourquoi l'Autre triomphe-t-il du mal ? Conformément à la conviction profonde de Levinas, la vie spirituelle peut être définie par opposition au mal, qui doit ici être compris d'une manière spécifique. Il ne s'agit pas seulement des différentes formes d'agression, de guerre, de tyrannie ou d'esclavage. Tout ce qui place l'homme dans une situation de propriétaire exclusif du monde doit être considéré comme le mal. Partout où il n'y a pas de place pour l'Autre, c'est le mal qui règne sans partage. La véritable signification de ce fondement moral du judaïsme, qui trouve d'ailleurs son origine dans la Bible, réside dans le fait que la conviction intérieure quant à la véracité d'un dogme ou à la justesse d'une doctrine ne constitue pas encore une source de vie spirituelle. C'est exactement le contraire: c'est précisément la source du mal et, en même temps, l'antithèse de la spiritualité. La seule façon d'éradiquer définitivement le mal est d'établir un lien étroit entre la moralité, la rationalité et le langage. La religion donc ne fait pas exception à cette règle: pour devenir une vie spirituelle, il est indispensable qu'elle reste éthique.

Il s'avère donc, selon Lévinas, que ce n'est pas la connaissance, mais la responsabilité qui constitue le contact le plus fondamental avec la réalité. La rencontre avec l'Autre n'est pas seulement une étape nécessaire dans le développement de la conscience ; elle rompt la dialectique de la domination et de la soumission. L'asymétrie de cette relation établit en même temps une véritable subjectivité, dans laquelle je me découvre non pas tant comme pensant ou conscient, mais précisément comme répondant. La responsabilité a une dimension métaphysique, elle constitue le premier principe et la première cause du monde, car être, c'est précisément répondre à l'appel de l'Autre. La soumission inconditionnelle à la responsabilité constitue à la fois l'essence et l'existence de l'homme, qui sont à l'origine de toute conscience. C'est pourquoi le problème de la subjectivité chez Lévinas est éthique et non ontologique.

Dans ce contexte, nous comprenons mieux les motifs de la réévaluation de la tradition philosophique occidentale. La confiance presque illimitée dans la connaissance fondée sur la vision a échoué. La vision n'est pas seulement un acte perceptif passif, mais elle remplit une fonction constitutive, s'appropriant les choses afin d'en tirer la totalité. Lévinas percevait dans l'histoire de la pensée occidentale une obsession particulière de la totalisation, réduisant l'Autre au Même. Dans son extraordinaire sensibilité, il identifiait ce processus à la quintessence du mal. Paradoxalement, c'est précisément dans le regard que Lévinas voyait le salut. Seuls les yeux, en tant que partie la plus exposée du corps humain, constituent une barrière infranchissable à toute tentation d'appropriation. Il ne s'agit plus de mes propres yeux, mais de ceux qui me regardent depuis le visage de l'Autre. Le visage m'oppose une résistance, me fait sortir de l'obscurité du solipsisme et m'introduit dans une nouvelle lumière. L'Autre, en me regardant, m'établit en même temps. Le visage de l'Autre neutralise le Cogito, lui enlève sa capacité de faire le mal, mais il ne le neutralise pas par le mal, mais par un appel : tu ne tueras point. L'interdiction de tuer qui émane de l'Autre est l'interdiction de le soumettre au mal du regard, de l'intégrer dans une quelconque totalité. Le visage de l'Autre, d'où résonne le « tu ne tueras point » originel, s'avère être un espace de transcendance, échappant efficacement aux mécanismes totalisants de la connaissance. Lévinas révèle ainsi une dimension de la spiritualité qui ne naît pas de l'affirmation d'un dogme ou de la contemplation d'une idée, mais de la responsabilité envers l'Autre, qui vient d'au-delà de l'ordre de la possession et qui, ce faisant, triomphe de la logique du mal. Les sources bibliques de cette intuition – notamment l'appel prophétique à la responsabilité et le commandement “Tu ne tueras point” – forment le socle de la pensée lévinassienne, dont cette communication démontrera la portée. C'est pourquoi l'éthique devient la philosophie première, et la transcendance signifie une résistance infinie au mal, qui s'enracine inévitablement dans toute tentative de totalisation, même si celle-ci est des plus subtiles.

Justyna Żak-Szwarc, Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw, Poland

The Grotesque Face of the Devil in Polish Folk Art

Abstract: The devil in folk art not only takes on a variety of forms, but also serves many different functions. In terms of function, we can distinguish devils such as tempting, deceiving, deceived, political, patriotic, justice-dispensing, guarding, debauched, wicked, playing, theatrical, and even cosmic. According to folk legends, the devil can accomplish much, but is often unable to cope with the slightest adversity. He is very similar to a human being and sometimes difficult to distinguish. In folk fantasies, it seems that people see themselves much more easily in the devil's mirror than in the angel's. In fact, the story of devils is a kind of metanarrative about themselves. Is it a problem of taming evil? Maybe it's a question of how to solve the problem of evil within ourselves, or how we can use the figure of the devil to maintain the impression that evil is something outside of us. Perhaps it is also a kind of excuse when we do not want to take responsibility for our mistakes or bad deeds, or a kind of alibi when we want to do evil to others.

In the folk imagination, the devil is definitely more grotesque than terrifying. He's often a clumsy, weak, and humorous creature, but he can also possess certain dangerous powers that can be used in convenient circumstances.

Polish Phenomenological Association