

Preface

This book aims to provide a conceptual history of the ways in which evil has been thought in the Western philosophical tradition. In so doing, it defends four different, but ultimately related, points: (1) while the conceptual problem of evil – how to reconcile the existence of evil with a God who is understood to be omnipotent, all-knowing, and supremely good – arose with and from the advent of Judaism and its movement to a monotheistic metaphysical system, it was with the rise of Christianity that it became *the* problem par excellence. Much ink was spilt trying to resolve this issue *within* an explicitly Christian framework, before Western thinking sought to abandon that framework for alternatives. Far from dissolving the problem of evil, these changes exacerbated it and, indeed, stimulated significant conceptual development, in relation to both the concept ‘evil’ and the metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological premises subtending it. (2) Contrary to popular belief, the meaning of evil is far from obvious or agreed upon; it is the almost complete lack of agreement about its meaning and what it refers to that is most striking, with this being because (3) each conception of evil is premised on different metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological assumptions. On first appearance, this might lead to the conclusion that Western philosophical thinking about evil is defined by a fundamental cleavage between pre- and post-Kantian thinking on the topic: the former basing itself explicitly on theological Christian doctrine which the latter abandoned. (4) I call into question any notion of a strict division between theologically (pre-Kantian) and secular (post-Kantian-)orientated analyses by showing that the latter often continue to employ theological language, concepts, motifs, or figures.

With this, the book contributes to the so-called theological (re)turn that has marked contemporary theory and specifically the line of critique that disrupts the notion that there exists a straightforward binary opposition

between the theological and secular. While it has increasingly abandoned any explicit link to Judaeo-Christian theology, Western thinking on evil continues to be shaped and framed, often in implicit and subtle ways, by the theological framework from which it originated as a conceptual problem.

These arguments will be more fully worked out in the text, but, at this stage, I am pleased to acknowledge that the book forms part of the activities for the Conex Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Project ‘Sovereignty and Law: Between Ethics and Politics’ (2013–00415–026), co-funded by the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, the European Union’s Seventh Framework Program for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration under Grant Agreement 600371, the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitivity (COFUND2013–40258), the Spanish Ministry for Education, Culture, and Sport (CEI-15-17), and Banco Santander. Information about the project can be found at <https://sovereigntyandlaw.wordpress.com>

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