Shades of Evil: An Interdisciplinary Gaze into the Abyss

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Abstract

Research on evil (as an autonomous concept) is somewhat rare, but significant, in the present day. The complexity of the topic, paired with its intrinsic relativeness and abstractness, possibly stimulates scholars to focus, rather than on the idea, on the many incarnations of evil: murder, delinquency, war *et similia*. This dissertation, on the other hand, aims to shed more light on the problem of evil by concentrating on three main questions. The first one, "what is evil", will be focused on trying to provide a definition of the concept of evil. The second one, "who is the evil person" will try to identify the essential characteristics of the evildoer. The last one, "why is evil alluring" will focus on determining the reason why, ultimately, evil sways more and more people. The dissertation's methodology and approach are interdisciplinary, drawing upon Criminology, Law, Psychology and Philosophy. Sources used will vary from academic journals to jurisprudence. Popular culture references are also employed. This work is fully aware of its intrinsic limitations, since a complete analysis of evil would require an encyclopedic scope, encompassing all fields of knowledge. However, employing an interdisciplinary methodology has allowed to gain significant insights, as looking at a complex problem comparatively allowed to highlight similarities and contrasts previously not enough fleshed out. Ultimately, research on evil will last as long as humanity will endure, as its mystery cannot be solved until a complete understanding of human nature is achieved.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to provide a better understanding of the problem of evil, the evildoer and its alluring, seductive power over "normal (non-criminal), good" people.

Evil. Few words are pervaded by such an innate and intrinsic power (Hood, 2011) in modern times. Despite scholarly opinion that contemporary mankind has superseded the transcendent, moral dimension (Praeg, 2010) and that "evil" is a word too impalpable and linked to thoughts of immutability and eternity (Baumeister et al., 2001; Layman, 2003a; Pugh, 2011a) to be of any real significance in an ever-changing reality such as ours (Waller, 2002), I believe that the importance of the word and concept are, in fact, magnified by it: in the chaos of modern world, it is paramount to centre oneself and ponder on the higher mysteries. How could such a topic not generate a spark of interest? I admit, not without a small tinge of guilt, to have fallen prey of that "Gothic Criminology" that relies on its fascination with "monstrous" events to try to channel its efforts to discern and understand (Winer, 2001) the mystery of Evil (Simpson, 2000; Picart & Greek, 2003; Welner, 2003).

Evil is a concept that, like good, pervades all facets of human life and yet, no single discipline has found an answer to the great mystery of its existence. Research on evil has long been considered as "one of the oldest and most provocative fields of human speculation" (Anders, 1994: 1): evil, ontologically, is bad, inconvenient, destructive (even self-destructive), painful and inefficient (Baumeister, 1999); how is it possible that it continues to exist and, even more importantly, how can it be so enticing for more and more individuals (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010)?

The first, most obvious discipline considered adequate to explain evil would be religion-theology (and, by extension, theodicy): no discipline could be better suited to the explanation of evil than one that investigates the roots of existence and the consequences of actions. And yet, Christianity raises more doubts than it gives certainties: in the book of Genesis, we have not only the unsettling tale of Lucifer, the light-bearer, the holiest of angels and God's favourite, who

becomes Satan, the enemy of men and embodiment of evil, due to his pride, to his love for himself surpassing the love for God (Baumeister, 1999; Zimbardo, 2007). Then there is the biblical story of Adam and Eve, banished from the Garden of Even because Eve fell prey to Satan's temptation and she, in turn, tempted Adam (Morton, 2004; Zimbardo, 2007). So, we are given the actors and the events, but are never told the *why* the Almighty not only did nothing to prevent the corruption of his greatest creation, the human being (Zimbardo, 2007); but also failed to find humanity "not guilty", having been tricked by an enemy far more powerful and cunning than they could be (Baumeister, 1999), relying instead on their future "salvation". A real-life, poignant example is the Holocaust: how could, a benevolent God, allow his children to carry out such horrible acts? In the end, it is never clarified why God allows the existence of evil to continue, and evil is reduced to being the method of the Great Corrupter, Satan, to exact his revenge on God: human beings are almost puppets, caught in the crossfire (Baumeister, 1999; Zimbardo, 2007).

The second discipline that could explain evil would be Law: what regulates the relationships between human beings in a civilised society should be qualified enough to solve the problem of evil by identifying what is good and what is not. Instead, Law provides us with the concepts of "legal" and "illegal", which more often than not are contaminated by the preconceptions, cultural background and beliefs of the law-makers (Morton, 2004): for example homosexuality, a behaviour which is part of human nature and has no intrinsic value (it just *is*), was punishable in extremely cruel ways in the United Kingdom (UK) and in other countries (it still is, in theocratic countries ruled by Islamic Law) until recent times: only a father's love was able to end this barbaric conduct (Woo, 2014). The UK is especially infamous, however, for the case of Alan Turing[2]. In fact, it can be said that Law aggravates the problem of evil by giving different values to the same behaviour

[2] Turing (1912 – 1954), one of the key personalities of the Second World War (WWII) that allowed the triumph of the Western World over the Nazis by decrypting the Enigma machine of the Nazi, was a homosexual. After WWII he was put on trial for said homosexuality and he had to undertake an oestrogen treatment instead of going to prison. Said treatment gave him gynecomastia and caused him to develop depression, which culminated in his suicide. It is acceptable to say that the perverse, monstrous laws and judges that convicted him have "murdered" him.

accordingly to the circumstances and the authors (Zimbardo, 2007), such as the killing of a human being: murder if perpetrated by a criminal; death penalty or self-defence (and thus, justified) if committed by the State (Barry, 2015).

Philosophy, the reasoning on the higher mysteries of men and beyond humanity, would be another suitable candidate: instead, it was proven than even the greatest philosophers were tainted by preconceptions which corrupted their reasoning (Samet-Porat, 2007). Their results are also so varied that they ultimately provide no solution and tend to aggravate the problem itself, by either dismissing the problem of evil (Samet-Porat, 2007; Calder, 2013) to the actual justification of its existence as part of human nature, thus labelling the entirety of human beings as vulnerable to the temptation of evil (Russell, 2010a; Russell, 2010b) or, even worse, as evil within (Praeg, 2010). Having been so influential in developing the other disciplines, and being so varied, philosophy will be examined in a transversal way, referring to it in other disciplines and, limitedly, autonomously.

Psychology and psychiatry are two other disciplines that one would believe suitable for understanding and solving the problem of evil, being focused on the human mind and human behaviours. A more accurate analysis proves how fallible relying on them would be. Not only the clinical criteria have varied so much during time (again, homosexuality is an excellent example, as it was considered in the past to be a psychiatric disease and a clear mark of depravity; Woo, 2014), but even the epistemology employed today is ambiguous and very subjective: antisocial, sociopath and psychopath are terms currently associated with evil and crime (most notably with serial killers; Baumeister, 1999; Knight, 2007). However, there is no unified, consistent usage, with different scholars providing different opinions on whether madness equates evil, or completely excludes it[3]. There is also the significant problem of the dismissal of the concept of evil by those disciplines, arguing its being too much permeated by arbitrary, moral connotations (Haybron, 2002; Knight, 2007; Knoll, 2008).

[3] Being evil inevitably linked with responsibility (even a mere moral responsibility) that those who are insane lack (Richman et al., 1999; Häkkänen, 2008)

In light of what stated before, I have structured the dissertation to focus on a couple of the essential elements of the problem of evil: its definition, the evil person and its seductions.

First of all, I will discuss what evil is, in order to identify the essential elements and boundaries of the question which will be carried throughout the whole dissertation. The necessity of a definition is not casual: by explaining a concept via other constructs (Baumeister et al., 2001) not only greater clarity is achieved, but the logical premise on which the writing is founded takes a more definite form (Alford, 1997). It is not an easy task: such a concept resists inevitably any kind of conceptual boundary (Alford, 1997; McSwithe, 2006), and the risk of bias and socio-cultural background "corrupting" the definition (Baumeister, 2010), if not altering it accordingly to familiar concepts and constructs is always present (Baumeister, 2001; Waller, 2002). In order to provide a satisfactory result, therefore, an interdisciplinary analysis will be performed, since no discipline has, as of today, achieved a satisfactory definition of evil or solved the problem of evil (McSwithe, 2006).

The second step will be to determine what manner of creature the evil being is. Is there such a thing as a natural evil (Layman, 2003b; Knoll, 2008)? Could a predatory animal be evil (Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999)? If so, what does it imply for mankind: that there is some "genetic destiny" planned, for every human being, determining his propensity to evil (Seto, 2003; Knoll, 2008)? That, indeed, some people are simply "born evil" (Zimbardo, 2007; Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014) and in their heart lies a certain pre-defined propensity and fascination with evil, which makes them more likely to be corrupted (Kant, 1793; Van Inwagen, 2006)?

Finally, I'll try to determine why the attraction to evil is so strong, why the allure of crime is so irresistible for a number of people, employing also the analysis of fictional characters who are evil yet extremely charismatic and likeable (Zimbardo, 2007; Heller, 2011).

My contribution to Criminological knowledge lies, first of all, in the expansive approach to the criminological problem of evil: an interdisciplinary analysis is relatively uncommon, possibly also due to its difficulty (Breen, 2003; Lawrence, 2011). It is, however, a necessary approach: not

only criminology is ontologically interdisciplinary, but understanding such a complex matter requires a flexibility which can best be achieved by taking into account factors and elements that belong to different disciplines (Turnau, 2004; Echavarría, 2013).

I also want to specify that this research does **not** aim to solve the problem of evil and its grasp over human nature: even if such an outcome was theoretically possible (which I do not believe to be the case; Murley, 2003; O'Halloran, 2014) I would not pursue it because, as it will be discussed, my belief is that there is more to the problem of evil than the determination of whether it is part of mankind or not (Morton, 2004; Clemens, 2011; Calder, 2013). To solve the enigma of good and evil (Layman, 2003b; Layman, 2003a; Morton, 2004) would imply being able to solve the cosmic mystery of existence (Anders, 1994; O'Halloran, 2014; Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014).

Methodology

This literary-based dissertation will very much rely on qualitative research. After analysing qualitative methodologies applied to criminology (Bryman, 2008; King & Wincup; 2008), I ultimately decided to opt for an approach made up of both thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, enhanced by the usage of sources detailing real-life and fictional examples.

Said sources are as varied as the topic requires: academic journals focused on Criminology are, of course, preferred but, considering the complexity of the argument, journals of psychology, law, religion and philosophy are also a necessity, as are essays centred on the topic itself. Judicial proceedings and statutes have also been employed. Similarly, conference papers and edited collections of mixed nature (legal, criminological, psychological, psychiatric and philosophical) have provided invaluable information and different perspective. Analysing the concept of evil is a complex task that requires flexibility: the disciplines employed, even if not exhaustive and with their limitations, allow a 360° view on the topic. In contrast with scholarly opinion which believes them to be incompatible with each other (Knoll, 2008), a comparative, interdisciplinary analysis is advantageous because each discipline complements, also through contrast, the other ones.

Qualitative research has been a long-time asset of research in criminology, dating back to the very beginning of the discipline (Miller, 2005): it is an extremely good epistemology for understanding not just the objective evidence, but also the subjective reasoning and motivations behind events and actions (Meuser & Löschper, 2002). In a dissertation focused on the problem of evil, a greater understanding of human nature, and thus of the mechanisms underlying it, is paramount.

Thematic analysis is very well suited to the identification of themes and pattens across significant sets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, 2012), thus allowing not only the tracing of the concept of evil across various disciplines (Guest, 2012), but also the possibility of creating the personalised pattern which my dissertation will follow. Thematic analysis, most importantly, is long-proved to be a methodology that works very well in synergy with Qualitative research (Trahan

and Steward, 2013).

Critical discourse analysis is an epistemology born out of the various methodologies applied to other disciplines (criminology, sociology, psychology), aimed at stimulating the researcher to employ a critical approach to commonly accepted knowledge, challenging axioms often considered long-time proved (LaFree and Dugan, 2004; McLaughlin and Muncie, 2012). Such a methodology is intertwined well with the dissertation's primary theme and necessity: this particular method of analysis, in addition to being especially appropriate for providing the researcher with various levels of interpretative freedom (Barry et al., 2006), has been proved to feature a very close synergy with real-life, practical issue, while simultaneously allowing enough freedom for abstract reasoning[4]. It also manages to highlight very effectively the importance of lexical choices in criminological research (Barry et al., 2006; Fairclough, 2013), as the level of linguistic communication sophistication is proportional to how advanced a civilisation is: as such, it demonstrates that words should are not chosen randomly, but the speaker even subconsciously weighs them, and chooses (as mentioned before, the usage of the term "evil" is not a by-product of random factors or political rhetoric: it is chosen on purpose; Van Dijk, 1997; Hood, 2011). If one digs deep enough in the reasoning behind the wording, it will be realised that, no matter how slight, there is a causation link between thought, word, event, social substratum and cultural background (Van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 2013).

Among the *corpus* of sources, real-life recounts and narrations deserve special highlighting. They have always been strong assets in criminology (Segrave, 2009): not only due to the undeniable appeal, the horrid fascination (Baumeister, 1999; Morton, 2004) with stories involving violence, evil or crime, which keep the listener engaged (D'Cruze, 2007; Knoll, 2008), but also because, in fact, most of the evidence and direct experience concerning evil comes as narration of those who survive it (Palermo, 2008; Segrate, 2009). Said choice is not controversy-free, however, as in

[4] A staple of qualitative research (Chamberlain, 2012).

addition to the victim's bias and personal perceptions (Baumeister, 1999) it is also necessary to acknowledge that a certain "sensationalism" pervades this kind of events, possibly magnifying them in ways that distort their original structure (Charles & Egan, 2008).

In light of this, employing fictional examples should be even more important (Badiou & Hallward, 2002), considering how widespread popular culture is (and, in fact, one has far higher chance to see a fictional murder than a real-life one) and that, ultimately, a fictional example will always be depicted exactly how its creators wants. In contrast with authoritative scholarly doctrine opposed to the usage of fictional examples (for being too "detached" from the complexity and dilemmas of real life, where rarely choices are black and white, but very strong shades of grey exist; Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999), I believe there is a good value in employing them: "fiction sometimes can teach us more about life, or what we think we know about life, than life itself" (Waller, 2002: 121).

Lastly, when conducting research on evil, there is always the risk of becoming too fascinated with it: however, Nietzsche's warning[5] is ever-present and prevents the researcher from losing his way, mirroring what Polaris, the North Star, does for sailors in a dark night.

[5]"He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you." (Nietzsche, 1886: Aphorism 146).

The Problem of Defining and Understanding Evil: what is Evil?

In order to provide a basic understanding of the problem when relating to "evil", in criminology, the definition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica provides a number of significant concepts to expand upon: "not good morally; marked by bad moral qualities; violating the rules of morality; wicked, sinful; a cosmic force producing evil actions or states; an evil person: one that embodies or personifies wickedness" (2015a: p.1). The nature of the problem is immediately clear: the concept of evil is permeated with meanings that belong to other disciplines, focused on different aspects of human life (Hugaas, 2010): law, philosophy, religion, morals and even socio-political context, implying a significant level of uncertainness and commingling (Heller, 1993; Alford, 1997; Baumeister, 1999; Baidou & Hallward, 2002; Knoll, 2008). In 2002, George W. Bush, during his speech addressing the State of the Union, defined North Korea, Iran and Iraq as an "axis of evil" (Millercenter.org, 2015: p.21) because of their endorsement and support of terrorism. What exactly did those states do, in order to prompt the usage of this powerful word? In other words (Knight, 2007: 25) "what is evil? Is evil something we are, or something we do?" (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010)? Asking ten different individuals would result in ten, most likely more, different answers (Alford, 1997). Those definitions would not necessarily imply negative connotations: the concept of a "necessary evil" (such as, for example, invasive and debilitating surgery in order to cure a dire illness) is well-known in modern society (Haksar, 2011). In other words, "evil" is a concept that is ever-changing (Steiner, 2002; Morrow, 2004), capable of morphing into various forms which are then perceived and understood differently accordingly to historical and social context (Garrard, 2002; Turnau, 2004).

Concerning sociology and criminology, the most significant examples of empirical studies concerning evil are Milgram's obedience study (1963) and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (1972): both studies proved the possibility of evil by mankind through actions of "normal" individuals. Both studies also demonstrated the difficulty, for the average human being, to actually perpetrate evil without some sort of self-justification and rationalisation mechanisms (Zimbardo,

1995). However, neither study reached the heart of the question: behaviour is evaluated as "evil" through extremely context-dependant variables, in turn subject to various degrees of interpretation.

Therefore, the necessity of a definition, of reliable parameters employed to determine what is evil is clear: like a ship lost in the fog needs a lighthouse to find its way, it is necessary to identify solid yet flexible criteria (Dillinger, 2004). The ordeal is of nigh-impossible difficulty (Neiman, 2004), however, caused also by the fact that "evil isn't a thing; it is a concept that some people find useful in trying to make sense of the absurdity, horror, sadism, and pain they find in the world" (Alford, 2001: 111).

An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Concept of Evil

It is necessary to immediately clarify that "natural evil" (in a literal sense, i.e. evil born in natural world) will not be considered relevant for the analysis: environmental disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes or tidal waves, while destructive and harmful, cannot be considered "evil nature" (Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999; Layman, 2003b; Heller, 2011). To do so would be inappropriate anthropomorphism[6]. "Feral, bestial violence" cannot be taken into account, either: while a feline predator may stalk its prey before devouring it, or a killer whale might "play" with the baby seal before devouring it, those acts cannot be considered evil: they are instinctual, dictated by hunger, territoriality or self-defence (Watson, 1995; Layman, 2003b). Not even a man-eating shark can be considered to be an "evil" creature: to do so is an unacceptable anthropomorphism (Heller, 2011). It is commonly accepted that "evil", to qualify as such, requires a degree of awareness and intent that even the most intelligent of animals, such as mammalians (e.g. cetaceans[7]), birds or reptiles lack[8]. Discernment, therefore, is the criterion that differentiates between a vicious animal attack (destructive and harmful, but not "evil") and a most foul murder perpetrated by an assassin. Thus, a treatise concerning the understanding of evil should focus on "human" evil.

In order to better understand the concept of evil across various disciplines, however, it is necessary to ascertain whether "pure evil" (PE) exists (Baumeister, 1999; Cole, 2006; Baumeister,

[6]Which is what the Ancient Greeks did, together with theantropism. Zeus (the storm and lightning), Neptune (the ocean), Hades (the afterlife and death): the gods are faces and personalities attributed to phenomena that could not be otherwise understood (Watson, 1995; Phillips, 2004; Van Inwagen, 2006).

[7]The only notable exception being bottlenose dolphins: pseudoscientific propagate the idea of them being the only other species (with humans) to kill for fun: in fact, said abnormal behaviour is simply not understood well enough to find any evidence supporting this claim (Williams, 2014).

[8]A significant, despite being pop-culture, example is found in the "Jurassic World 2015 movie: when the protagonists find the senseless carnage of gigantic herbivores left by the genetically-engineered *Indominus Rex*, they immediately notice how the slaughter was perpetrated "for sport", as they were not eaten and left agonising in excruciating pain (Jurassic World, 2015). The *Indominus* was a hybrid dinosaur created by mixing the DNA of several other species, dinosaurs and even *Homo Sapiens* (the etymological origin of *Sapiens* is "capable of discerning") DNA (Vis, 2015), with the deliberate purpose of making it "bigger, faster and crueller" (cruelty is a concept associated with human intelligence, attributed to animals only due to anthropomorphism; Watson, 1995) than the others (Jurassic World, 2015). The film-makers also stated they deliberately wished to make the *Indominus* a symbol representing humanity's worst tendencies, including hungry consumerism (Maharana, 2015).

2010; Van Prooijen & Van de Veer, 2010; Webster & Saucier, 2015), whether objective, quasi-mathematical criteria for identifying evil are available and, if so, to identify them. The concept of PE is one that is especially popular in fictional works throughout time (Baumeister, 1999; Farrel, 2008): the idea of an enemy embodying everything that is vile and detestable is convenient and relatively easy to introduce, successfully, to spectators. Real life, however, is not a movie nor a book, and truthfully there is much more behind an act of evil than the "mere" desire to inflict pain on others.

It is necessary to establish that an analysis of PE requires, for completeness and coherence, a concept of "pure good" (PG) (Hood, 2011; Webster & Saucier, 2013): while it is appreciated that shades of evil exist in a world of contradictions, an absolute such as PE requires a counterpart in order to be identified. Therefore, accordingly to scholarly interpretation, it could be useful to examine both absolutes, simultaneously and in parallel, through a paradigm inspired by expanding upon Baumeister's "myth of pure evil" model (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010; Webster & Saucier, 2013).

First of all, PE and PG must be intentional[9]: while PE intentionally inflicts harm, PG intentionally assists and helps those who are in need (Baumeister, 1999; Snyder et al., 2004; Baumeister, 2010). Secondly, PE and PG are motivated by desire: but while PE is fuelled by the selfish desire to experience pleasure by inflict harm, PG is selfless in its desire, its reward is the act, not the glory (Batson, 1991; Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010). Thirdly, the victims of PE can only be good and, ultimately innocent[10]; while PG does not distinguish between good or evil recipients (Katz, 1988; Batson, 1991; Baumeister, 1999). Fourthly, PG and PE cause repercussions in other people's lives: however, PE is destructive, while PG is harmonising and tends to keep, or restore, the *status quo* (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010; Batson, 1991). Fifthly, PE and PG are

[9]Therefore, excluding from the analysis any possibility of "natural evil" (Heller, 2011; Layman, 2003b).

[10]Otherwise, one might argue there would be no evil in inflicting suffering over a miscreant who has probably earned it (Baumeister, 1999; Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 2010).

mutually incompatible and alien: one cannot corrupt nor influence the other one[11] (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010). Sixthly, PE is an essential, congenital trait of the evildoer[12], PG can be either innate or developed *a posteriori*, following "redemption" and abandoning an evil lifestyle (Baumeister, 1999; Snyder et al., 2004). Seventhly, PG and PE are qualified by the target: while PG is community-serving, PE is self-serving (Batson, 1991; Baumeister, 1999). Lastly, PE is savage, unrestrained and very common throughout history[13]; PG, on the other hand, is exceedingly rare because it requires a self-control and moral compass that most people lack (individuals such as Mahatma Gandhi or Oskar Schindler are perfect examples: they are exceptional human specimen; Batson, 1991; Baumeister, 1999; Snyder et al, 2004).

This paradigm, when applied to real life, shows its limitations: despite being perfect for abstract reasoning and fictional representations, it is obvious that paragons of PG or PE are exceedingly rare in the real world. Perception, however, often "blinds" one to contradictory elements and paints the: e.g. Bin Laden, a criminal mastermind and terrorist, was often portrayed[14] as a paragon of PE of almost mythical proportions (Winch, 2005).

Therefore, in order to reach a true understanding of the concept of evil, an interdisciplinary analysis is required, through disciplines that scrutinise both the mundane and the transmundane.

The first discipline to consider when trying to define evil would be, naturally, theology, being the field of knowledge which has most frequently dealt with the problem of evil. One of its sub-disciplines, theodicy[15], is also especially relevant for understanding the problem of evil. An analysis of all religions would be impractical and, ultimately, impossible to fit in an interdisciplinary dissertation. Thus, Christianity shall be the object of the investigation, referencing

[11]The relationship is very much reminiscent of black and white: one is the polar opposite of the other, where one exists the other cannot coexist. Point six helps understanding this.

[12]In other words, he is "born evil".

[13]Any history manual is abundant in acts of violence.

[14]Notwithstanding his horrendous deeds, he was a mere man, albeit very charismatic and skilled, felled in darkness with a simple gun, in a land scorched by the sun. Perception, influenced by the mass media, created his myth as a paragon of PE and PG: a Champion of Islam and the Enemy of the Western World (Winch, 2005).

[15]The study of the relationship between a benevolent, all-powerful deity and the existence of evil.

other religions[16] only *per accidens*, when necessary. Christianity, in the Western World, is the single faith that has been most influential and pervasive in shaping the social, moral and legal framework of society until the advent of secularisation (Olave, 2007; Martinez, 2013).

Theology is not an unbiased, neutral discipline to employ when investigating evil: of course, any definition of evil achieved through an analysis of Christianity alone will be tainted with concepts of "sin" and "moral" (Watson, 1995; Santilli, 2007) very often based on questionable principles (such as the *corpus* of prohibitions concerning homosexuality and sexual behaviour; Ricks & Dziegielewski, 2005; Woo, 2014). But religious principles are still very valuable when trying to understand the problem of evil, since evil and sin have always enjoyed a mutual relationship: in fact, accordingly to theology, sin could be considered a form of evil customised to the complexity of human interactions (Dillinger, 2004).

Most religions associate the concept of evil with "fall" and "temptation" (Morton, 2004; Santilli, 2007): Christianity identifies Lucifer (also known as Satan) and its fall from grace and Heaven as the "prime evil"[17], the original root of sin. In the myth, Lucifer, the "light-bearer", was God's favourite angel, the most beautiful of all, until he fell prey to the temptation of pride, believing himself to be God's equal, or greater (Baumeister, 1999; Morton, 2004), and was afterwards cast out (Zimbardo, 2007; Rollis, 2011). His exterior appearance is also ruined, matching the hideousness of his heart and becoming the archetypical, eponymous image of the Devil with horns, bat wings and pointed tail (Baumeister, 1999). This transformation marks his status as "the demonic source of evil in the world" (Morton, 2004: 2) for Christianity and other religions[18]. Even his name changes: from "light-bearer" to "Satan, the adversary" (Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999; Ellens, 2011b) and thus begins his struggle against God, their (Ellens, 2011a: 4) "cosmic war, the battlegrounds of which are history and the human heart" (Watson, 1995; Baumeister et al., 2001).

[16]Especially those share a common ground, such as Judaism.

[17]Therefore, only the Devil is evil *per se*: it is its essential trait.

[18]Islam and Judaism feature Satan in their holy texts, his role in Islam is almost identical to Christianity (Echavarría, 2013).

The first concept deductible from this "cosmogony of evil", therefore, is that conflict is central for a proper analysis centred on evil: what is not good, must be evil and not opposing it may be equated, even mistakenly, with endorsement (Baumeister, 1999). It is a very radical view, and overly simplistic for real-life while very apt for Biblical allegory: everyday life sees an increasingly high number of situations featuring various outcomes, sometimes with no "good" option[19]; where, indeed, the choice is between evils of various intensity and the person has to choose the "lesser of two evils, the necessary evil" (Van Inwagen, 2006; Haksar, 2011).

Accordingly to the Bible, Satan will never be powerful enough to defeat God: however, he *does not* need to: Satan's role is that of a corrupter, and he very well has the power to corrupt God's greatest work, mankind, tempting them to love themselves more than they love God (Zimbardo, 2007) and making them believe that evil is good and wrong is right (Heller, 1993). His first attempt is a great success, taking the form of a serpent[20] in order to tempt Eve (Ellens, 2011b), Eve in turn tempts Adam through sex and pride (Morton, 2004); their fall from grace taints mankind forever with sin (Watson, 1995; Waller, 2002; Clemens, 2011). Thus, Satan's first triumph is a reproduction of his own fall: the "adversary" entices Eve and Adam with pride (albeit for a good cause, the research for truth and greater knowledge; Zimbardo, 2007) by deluding them that they shall become God's equal if they eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Zimbardo, 2007; Pugh, 2011b). In the New Testament, Satan tries to corrupt Jesus in the desert, but fails (Baumeister, 1999). Evil through temptation is in fact defined as *diabolical*: the deliberate corruption of others (Morton, 2004; Allen, 2007).The analysis, at this point, reaches a standstill: other than the origin of the Devil, Christianity does very little in explaining what evil is[21]. Of course, it does provide lists of

[19]Such as deciding whether a terminally ill relative should be subject to palliative care or not: saying "yes" would prolong his life, but inflicting possibly a lot of suffering; saying "no" would obviously accelerate death; indecision would prolong the suffering for no reason.

[20]The Biblical allegory employs an obvious phallic imagery, further associating sexual behaviour with sin and evil (Ellens, 2011b).

[21]This is true for the Bible itself: there is plenty of written productions by saints, or encyclical letters (Allen, 2007; Echavarría, 2013). However, their validity is questionable, being the product of human activity.

forbidden behaviours (sometimes employing the words “evil, sin, God's Law”), warns about evil thoughts and depicts evil people, but ultimately neither the Old or the New Testament provide a definition beyond the tautology “forbidden by Divine Law, thus evil”.

Considering there is no consistent definition of evil to be found in Christianity, it is necessary to examine the problem of theodicy. How is it possible that the benevolent and omniscient Christian God allows the existence of evil? It is not possible to understand how monstrous acts such as the Holocaust, the Gulags, or even natural disasters such as the Tsunami that hit the Philippines have happened, with God being a mere bystander, not acting to save his most beloved creation[22] (Layman, 2003a; Layman, 2003b; Morton, 2004). This philosophical, other than theological, interrogative, much like the question on evil, is largely unsolved and it has never been satisfactorily addressed by any faith, Christian or otherwise (Van Inwagen, 2006). St. Augustine's answer, for example, it two-fold: evil does not exist nor is allowed by God, but is simply an absence of good[23] caused by humans abusing their free will (Praeg, 2010; Eppens, 2011; Echavarría, 2013) and by devils maliciously wreaking havoc (Eppens, 2011; Echavarría, 2013). A less mythological, more secular answer is provided by Taliaferro (1998: 306):

> “If God is to bestow upon man a kind of freedom which is not just artificial but really significant, He must allow man a wide scope of choices and actions. Indeed, the kind of freedom which is basic to the accomplishment of great and noble actions is the kind of freedom which also allows the most atrocious deeds. In creating man and giving him free will, God thereby created an astonishing range of possibilities for both the creation and the destruction of value.”

Thus, evil would be the price humanity paid for free will: we all must be free do to good or evil

[22]A Biblical precedent exists, found in the Book of Job: Job is a good, wealthy man blessed by fortune. Satan challenges God by saying that, were his fortune to end, he'd curse God. God agrees for Satan to torture him (with the exception of killing him) and Job is robbed of his wealth, family and health. And yet, he never curses God, who wins against Satan and rewards Job by doubling everything he lost and blessing him with a longer life (The Bible new International Version, 1987). Despite the “happy ending”, it is still incomprehensible why would God agree in the first place: being omniscient, He knew Job's heart was good, and did not need to test his faith (Echavarría, 2013).

[23]Sickness, for example, is merely absence of health; vice is the absence of virtue (Eppens, 2011).

(Allen, 2007).

Two very important concepts concerning the definition of evil can be extrapolated with a theological analysis: first of all, that "evil" is, in its essence, a force, a power in its own right, transcending the mere human dimension, eternal and opposed by specular "good". Secondly, that said transcendent boundary is indissolubly intertwined with the human dimension and free will: human actions create petty cruelties and monstrous genocides, and both cause evil to advance in the world. Similarly, small acts of kindness, just like heroic actions, help in keeping the darkness at bay.

The second discipline to look at, when trying to understand evil, is philosophy. The concept of evil tends to be understood in a two-fold way: moral evil and natural evil (Layman, 2003a; Layman, 2003b). The former is born out of actions perpetrated by individuals (i.e. murder; Layman, 2003a; Oppy, 2004); the latter, as mentioned before, is concerned with evil consequences spewing from uncontrollable variables (i.e. a tsunami, or being born with a genetic malformation; Layman, 2003b; Ellens, 2011a). As mentioned before, it is difficult to imagine natural evil as "real evil", being caused by completely random events, or creatures lacking discernment or intentionality (Ellens, 2011a). In the vast literature of philosophy, Immanuel Kant analyses both. Accordingly to his doctrine, evil is mostly created by evil actions, by deviating from the path of virtue (Kant, 1793; Gressis, 2007; Duncan, 2012). This axiom not only excludes natural evil from the analysis, but also endorses the idea that evil is, ultimately, indissolubly linked to human evil, as evil can arise only when there is moral responsibility (Gressis, 2007; Duncan, 2012). The most important principle to understand from Kant's analysis of evil is extreme dependency on awareness and understanding: without reason, there can be no evil (Kant, 1793; Kant, 1883; Gressis, 2007; Duncan, 2012).

The third discipline that should be approached when trying to define evil is law, the construct regulating civilisation. In Western legislations, supposedly secular and devoid of religious and moralistic influences, there is no such thing as the concept of evil: legislators, instead, employ expressions such as "unlawful", "illegal", "illicit" (Heller, 1993; Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999) which only have a meaning if analysed jointly with the corresponding legal system and society

(Morton, 2004). The criteria by which an act is marked as "illegal", therefore, respond to either an intrinsic "wrongness" (*mala per se*) or to, almost tautologically (it is illegal because *it is illegal*), the mere unlawfulness (*mala prohibita*). It is clear that said criteria are not set in stone, since every country has its own, and are vulnerable to relativism and political evaluation.

The legislator, however, considers the the possibility of taking into account circumstances[24], either aggravating (those that increase its hideousness, such as premeditation or cruelty) or mitigating (those that diminish the value of the act, such as being provoked) which, ultimately, qualify the act as "more, or less, evil" (Garner & Black, 2004).

It is also important to point out that, even if the law itself does not feature a definition of evil, said concept is **not** alien to judges, and they act accordingly to their own bias and criteria of evil (Welner, 2003). Evidence of this is found by examining a number of judicial proceedings emanated by the Supreme Courts of the UK and of Italy, with the additional consideration of the European Court of Human Rights. They all provide examples of actual usage of the word "evil" in jurisprudence, thus demonstrating how pervasive, at subconscious level, said concept is.

Table 1: the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom[25]

Rhodes v OPO & Anor [2015] UKSC 32	Defendant's behaviour defined as "evil conduct"
R v Howe [1986] UKHL 4	*Id.*
Hyam v DPP [1974] UKHL 2	Emphasis on "evil consequences" due to the defendant's actions
R v Lambert [2001] UKHL 37; [2001] 3 WLR 206	Trafficking of drugs described as a "social evil"

[24]Examples of those are found in Schedule 21 of the UK Criminal Justice Act 2003 and in Articles 61, 62 and 62-bis of the Italian Penal Code. Those statutory provisions allows the judge to inflict a heavier or lighter sentence.

[25]Formerly the House of Lords.

A & Ors v. Secretary of State for the Home Department [2005] UKHL 71	Definition of terrorism as one of the most evil practices known to man

Table 2: the Supreme Court of Italy[26]

Penale Sent. Sez. U., 2011: 12	Emphasis on the laws applied for the case of the defendant to be aimed at those who exhibit a "particularly evil nature[27]"
Penale Sent. Sez. 1, 2014: 2	*Id.*
Penale Sent. Sez. 5, 2012: 4	Nature of the defendant identified as particularly evil and devoid of any sense of mercy[28]
Penale Ord. Sez. 7, 2012: 2	Nature of the defendant defined as "particularly evil and violent"

Table 3: The European Court of Human Rights

MOUVEMENT RAELIEN SUISSE v. SWITZERLAND - 16354/06 [2012] ECHR 1598	Identification of "statal silencing" of opinions as an evil born out of the loss of freedom of dissent
RIBIC v. CROATIA - 27148/12 - Chamber Judgment [2015] ECHR 336	Declaration of the behaviour of the accused as cause of irreparable harm and evil to the victims
DUDGEON v. THE UNITED KINGDOM - 7525/76 [1981] ECHR 5	Behaviour related ad comparable to blackmail is defined as evil

[26]The "Corte di Cassazione".

[27]Lit. "indole particolarmente malvagia".

[28]Lit. "priva del senso dell'umana pietà".

The above points, despite not being a surprise, imply the possibility of biased, unfair laws being promulgated and discriminatory proceedings to take place, due to how deeply the socio-cultural context influences those exercising sovereign power[29] (Zimbardo, 2004; McGovern, 2011). When law and religious, moralistic (Lothane, 2011) principles become too intertwined, there is always the risk of classifying as illegal or criminal behaviours that have no traits of criminality, or evil: e.g. sodomy laws (Ricks & Dziegielewski. 2005; Woo, 2014). Throughout history, there have been many attempts to control sexuality and promiscuity by defining it as evil and contrary to God. The Buggery Act 1533, promulgated under Henry the VIII, prohibited "buggery", defined by judicial precedent as either bestiality[30], anal intercourse[31] and oral intercourse[32]. The punishments varied from death to seizure of goods and stripping of social status (Spence, 1953). While today such a law would be seen as monstrous in Western countries, theocratic or religion-prevalent countries which allow a high degree of contamination between sacred texts and law (mostly Islamic-matrix), "deviant" sexual behaviour is punished with prison or death.
In Qatar, homosexual Muslims can be sentenced to death; in Saudi Arabia they face risk of castration; similar law exist in United Arab Emirates, Iran, and Singapore (Picq & Thiel, 2015; Scheinert, 2015). It is important to point out that, since laws tend not to prohibit homosexuality *per se*, but "homosexual acts", female homosexuality has often enjoyed a regime of relative legality (caused, perhaps, due to a complete lack of acknowledgement by male, androcentric law-makers; Scheinert, 2015).

Another significant problem, when trying to relate the concept of evil and law, is law's "absolute relativism": a legal system may define the same act as "lawful" or "unlawful", depending on the circumstances and perpetrator (Heller, 1993; Zimbardo, 2004; Zimbardo, 2007; Lothane. 2011). The killing of another human being, for example, is universally recognised as one of the

[29]Either directly, such as legislators, or through rule of law, such as judges.

[30]*R v Bourne* (1952) 36 Cr App R 135

[31]*R v Wiseman* (1718) Fortes Rep 91

[32]*R v Jacobs* (1817) Russ & Ry 331

worst, criminal, evil acts a human being can perpetrate (Baumeister, 1999; Baumeister, 2010). Normally, it is identified by the law as "murder"[33]. However, cases do exist in which not only the act is justified, but it is actually lawful and supported by the state: in armed conflict, no soldier is prosecuted for murdering his enemies (Takahashi, 2011), nor is the executioner when carrying out a death penalty sentence (Baumeister, 1999; D'Cruze, 2007; Barry, 2015). Capital punishment, even if reserved only for the most heinous[34] crimes (such as, obviously, murder; D'Cruze, 2007; Kirchengast, 2009) demonstrates how, depending on circumstances and/or author[35], the same behaviour is tolerated and endorsed in one context, vilified and punished in another. Police shooting in self-defence against criminals is another, more understandable example (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999): obviously, in this case the right to live involves the death of another[36] (Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999). Imprisonment, and punishment in general, is also considered a "necessary evil" (Zimbardo, 1995; Zimbardo, 2007; Haksar, 2011) authorised and delivered by the law[37].

In light of the above analysis it is clearer now why law, by itself, is inadequate in defining evil: it has a very high degree of subjectivity, due to a very strong "human factor" involved in the legal creation process. Its intrinsic relativism, masquerading as absolutism, indissolubly intertwined with socio-cultural factors and context, should prompt the reader to undertake a process of comparison and interpretation.

Therefore, law does not provide a substantial definition of evil, but rather a significant insight: "evil" is not a monolithic concept, and it requires a flexible approach which allows a case-by-case evaluation, in order to better relate to its multi-faceted nature.

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[33]The legal terminology emphasises both the act itself and its unlawfulness: without them, there is no murder. In some countries, euthanasia is lawful, therefore the same act, in principle, is met with different answers.

[34]With a notable exception: England's "Bloody Code", between 1688 and 1815, punished with death almost 200 offences, including larceny, for deterrence purposes (Wade, 2009; Wilf, 2010).

[35]A causation link is evident: there needs to be a "judgement of death" and an executioner to carry it out.

[36]The argument for providing law enforcement with non-lethal weapons (even if limited to patrol) however, exists and is already a reality in some countries, e.g. Norway (Zimbardo, 2007).

[37]Of course, without taking into account cases of erroneous imprisonment, or worse, of wrong capital sentencing (Radelet et al., 1992; Gross, 1996; Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004).

Scientific, including medical, disciplines appear to have developed a new-found interest in analysing evil, if one considers the amount of research papers focused on it (Knoll, 2008). It would be unfair to define this interest as new: ever since Freud (1927) and, more recently, the "Depravity Standard" Project (2015), attempts to discern a "clinical definition of evil" have always existed. Psychology and Psychiatry, among the medical disciplines, appear to be ideal candidates for understanding evil, due to their tendency to delve into the "mind of the beast" and provide an understanding, albeit partial, of how the human mind works.

Due to their relative infancy, both disciplines have been influenced by philosophical or religious reasoning: in her academic investigation concerning the origins of the concept of Evil and Satan, Pagels (2011: xvii) offers a challenging hypothesis concerning Satan's psychological impact as "humanity's mirror" (Zimbardo, 2007: 4):

> "What fascinates us about Satan is the way he expresses qualities that go beyond what we ordinarily recognize as human. Satan evokes more than the greed, envy, lust, and anger we identify with our own worst impulses, and more than what we call brutality, which imputes to human beings a resemblance to animals ("brutes") [...] Evil, then, at its worst, seems to involve the supernatural—what we recognize, with a shudder, as the diabolic inverse of Martin Buber's characterization of God as 'wholly other'."

The attitude psychiatry and psychology towards evil is conflictual (Simon, 2003; Carey, 2005): two major doctrines exist, a "*pro*-definition" and a "*contra*-definition" of evil.
The nexus of the argument lies in the axiom of evil being a concept too much saturated with religious, moralistic and philosophical traits for scientific, unbiased analysis (Richman et al., 1999) and that, ultimately, trying to constrict evil into clinical criteria might be more harmful than beneficial because it would "blind" professionals to other, potentially unbiased perspectives (Alford, 2001; Knoll, 2008). On the other hand, projects that try to provide "standardised", clinical definitions of evil *do*[38] exist (The Depravity Standard, 2015), albeit at an embryonic stage. As of

[38]The argument being not about the existence of evil, but that a clinical definition is possible, requiring it only a lot of effort (Welner, 2003; The Depravity Standard, 2015).

today, the closet concept available to professionals of evil could be considered the one for "Antisocial Personality Disorder", found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder V*: a consistent, continuant behaviour (i.e. excluding occasional episodes, such as drug abuse; nor related to medical conditions) actualising in violating the physical and/or mental integrity and rights of other people though deceit, impulsiveness, hostility, trickery, lack of empathy, regret or emotion in front of consequences[39] (Jaffe, 2010; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Therefore, how does psychology, or psychiatry, behave[40] when trying to explain or treat the mechanisms that cause a serial killer, or a child molester, to act the way he[41] acts?

In the past[42], said reason was either not investigated or merely labelled as a generic "insanity"[43]: said concept, however, was not defined by clinical criteria and thus was prone to abuse by the powerful (Richman et al., 1999, Baldry, 2009) nor it was of any help in identifying evil individuals. Today, after a diagnosis of insanity, professionals question if the individual is aware of his behaviour and thus responsible for his actions; hence, if the actions were perpetrated with *intent*[44] (Kekes, 1998; Zimbardo, 2007). Obeying to uncontrollable impulses cannot lead to a classification as evil, and consequent punishment (Marzano, 2003). The madman is, therefore, assimilated to an animal. Unlike an animal, however, he simply cannot be put down with lethal force, and is instead incapacitated, helped if possible.

Consequentially to this dilemma, a number of terms has been conceived in order to avoid the label of "evil", considered to be too meaningful[45] for a clinical environment (Richman et al., 1999;

[39]Those traits have been found consistently in delinquent individuals (Ferguson, 2010; Book et al., 2015).

[40]The question is not merely academic: health professionals have been (some still are) biased by preconceptions or beliefs, including religious ones, leading to abuse being inflicted on patients (Richman et al., 1999).

[41]While delinquent women exist, the overwhelming majority of individuals associated with those crimes is made up of men (Watson, 1995; Knoll, 2008; Kanazawa, 2009).

[42]Diagnosis of "demonic possession" is voluntarily excluded (Wright et al., 2009).

[43]Insanity, as of today, is still a legal defence in Criminal Law, albeit very rarely used and really controversial (Baumeister, 1999; Waller, 2002; Knight, 2007).

[44]This criterion is legally relevant: unintentional killing, rather than "murder", is classified as "manslaughter", and is punished with a lighter sentence.

[45]As mentioned before, too rich in connotations and traits associated with it.

Knoll, 2008). As of today, two definitions are preponderant, and controversial[46]: psychopath[47] and sociopath. Both postulate insanity, whose severity varies and thus it does not always exclude awareness or intents; both postulate a serious lack of empathy[48] (Slovenko, 2001; Waller, 2002). However, the sociopath should be fully capable of experiencing emotions[49] and prone to spontaneous, unrestrained outbursts; the psychopath, instead, is chillingly emotionless, utterly incapable of experiencing any sort of feeling (Bouchard et al., 1990; Samenow, 2014). Sociopaths are hypothesised to be the result of learned behaviour and environmental factors[50], while psychopaths should be "born" genetically defective (Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

Of the two, the psychopath is the one most commonly associated with evil, followed by the sociopath (Zimbardo, 2007; Walsh & Bolen, 2012). However, a diagnosis is not considered a sufficient reason for justifying incapacitation or punishment: an additional qualification, through commissive or omissive action, is required to qualify person and behaviour as evil (Zimbardo, 2007; Jaffe, 2010).

Lastly, it is necessary to specify that psychopathy and sociopathy are exceedingly rare occurrences, too rare to explain[51] the multitude of evil acts performed throughout the world (Zimbardo, 2007; Walsh, 2009). History's worst war criminals, such as the Nazi, were also not psychopaths (Haslam & Reicher, 2007). In fact, it has been specified that some of the most vile events of history occurred due to ordinary people perpetrating evil actions (Waller, 2002; Zimbardo, 2007). Therefore, no conclusive explanation exists concerning the impulse of evil in the ordinary

[46]As of today, debates on whether those terms are appropriate still exist (Levin & Fox, 2008; Houlihan, 2009; Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

[47]Etymologically descending from Ancient Greek, *psyke* (soul) and *pathos* (feeling, suffering).

[48]Etymologically descending from Ancient Greek, *empatheia* (passion) and *pathos* (feeling, suffering). Also defined as the "biological virtue" (Watson, 1995) that allows one human being to understand the views and feelings of another one (Morton, 2004).

[49]Mostly negative, such as rage or frustration (Waller, 2002; Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

[50]Being also named "acquired psychopaths" (Walsh & Bolen, 2012: 164).

[51]The attempt to qualify all terrorists as psychopaths by identifying the "psychopathology of terrorism", ended up instead demonstrating how "ordinary", non-psychopathic, a terrorist is (Waller, 2005).

person. It simply happens, without reason or warning[52].

A number of significant insights can be derived from the above analysis: evil requires awareness (even of itself) and intention; in turn, this allows understanding of whether the individual is responsible or not for his actions. A certain degree of self-control is, therefore, required: whoever lacks free will cannot be considered evil, while those that "merely" have their aggressiveness unrestrained (such as certain sociopaths or psychopaths) are. Lastly, evil simply "occurs": it arises even in individuals beyond suspicion, but no-one has yet understood why.

[52]In the words of Chesterton (1925: 164) "There comes an hour in the afternoon when the child is tired of 'pretending'; when he is weary of being a robber or a Red Indian [...] It is then that he torments the cat".

Conceptualising Evil

Across all the disciplines examined, killing has been consistently identified as the most vile and revolting of evil acts[53], especially when the act is of extraordinary proportions[54] and/or senseless: Katz (1988) actually calls senseless murder "Primordial Evil", the one pre-dating all others. Therefore, killing[55] can be considered to be the "act of supreme evil".

A number of points can be highlighted for the purpose of answering the interrogative "what is evil". First of all, evil is a force acting both inside and outside of man, but it cannot exist outside the human dimension. Secondly, evil is not monolithic or immutable, but multi-faceted and conflictual, capable of taking up as many forms as the context allows. Thirdly, evil needs to be self-aware to exist, and can sprout from even the most ordinary of subjects, through their deliberate behaviour[56]. Therefore, as a tentative definition, evil is an autonomous, self-sufficient entity; it is not the absence of good, caused by lack of love or respect for others; nor it requires a "reason" to exist; it is both immanent and transcendent to humanity.

Ultimately, like good, evil simply *is*.

[53]Even more so if the victim is innocent, such as a child (Cettl, 2013).

[54]Such as genocide (Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004; Barry, 2015).

[55]Or, rather, murder.

[56]As long as alternatives exist and there is enough awareness to understand and being able to choose them.

Who is the Evil Person?

By acknowledging how indissolubly evil is intertwined with human existence, it is necessary now to scrutinise the concept of "evil person" (EP): what manner of beast is it? Evil is harmful, destructive, inconvenient and ultimately inefficient (Baumeister, 1999): reasonably, no one would perpetrate evil to achieve material ends[57]. And yet, evil has always been widespread at capillary level. What kind of brute is more susceptible to evil's empty promises[58]?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in accordance with the concept stating how natural disasters cannot be considered truly "evil", beasts are not relevant for this analysis (Watson, 1995; Simon, 2003). Human beings have an almost identical genetic code with other living creatures, up to 98% (98.4% with chimpanzees; Waller, 2002; Van Inwagen, 2006), yet, that 2% difference has allowed *Homo Sapiens* to evolve into a completely different being, bestowing the faculties of reason, imagination and discernment[59]. Evil requires more than mere infliction of harm, like a shark would do by eating its prey: it involves a certain degree of deliberateness and awareness, as opposed to instinct which, by its own definition, does not involve reason.

[57]The risk/profit factor is unfavourable: for example, a mugging has the high risk of being caught with a high uncertainty concerning the actual profit (as a wallet may be empty, or consisting of debit, PIN-locked cards) of the criminal activity Baumeister, 1999).

[58]The only real accomplishment of evil is the infliction of pain and suffering to others, not material gain (Baumeister, 1999). Therefore, they are empty to the vast majority of criminals (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999).

[59]In the words of Dostoevsky (1958: 278) "[...] people sometimes speak of man's 'bestial' cruelty, but this is very unfair and insulting to the beasts: a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so ingeniously, so artistically cruel. A tiger merely gnaws and tears to pieces, that's all he knows. It would never occur to him to nail men's ears to a fence and leave them like that overnight, even if he were able to do it."

An Interdisciplinary Glance at the Evil Person

In order to analyse the EP a real-life case study is appropriate (Baumeister, 1999): however, the risk of relying either on extraordinary examples (dictators, terrorists etc.) or, on the other hand, to employ mass media-like attitude and focus on cases that are inappropriate due to their extraordinary circumstances is ever-present. Having identified cold-blooded murder[60] as the catalyst evil act (Watson, 1995; Katz, 1988; Zimbardo, 2007) a case should be employed[61]. No other act of evil instils such a high morbid fascination in the public, mixed with horrified repulsion: stories or TV shows detailing killers are always popular (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999; Zimbardo, 2007), the public exhibits an undeniable curiosity and hunger for those cases (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999; DeFife, 2010). A natural disaster, or a war massacre, does not provoke the same fascinated captivation (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999): the enthralment is created by the human, intimate, detailed dimension[62]. Therefore, an "ordinary", low-profile murder case would be ideal for trying to portray the EP, possibly old too, in order to avoid mass media surfing the emotion wave ignited by the act. Serial killers should be avoided, however, because of their rarity, together with psychopaths (Carey, 2005; Bonn, 2014); war criminal are unsuitable as well, being exemplars of extraordinary individuals perpetrating evil on such a large scale that it becomes a calamity (Waller, 2002; Russel, 2010).

Truman Capote's masterpiece (1965) *In Cold Blood*, considered the first "true crime; non-fiction novel" of the modern era is, therefore, an ideal source (Baumeister, 1999; Linnemann, 2015). Capote himself became deeply fascinated with this case (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013); it has been theorised that Capote, an openly homosexual man, developed an emotional attachment with one of

[60]Not the rage-ignited killing of an unfaithful spouse (Katz, 1988).

[61]Especially considering how frequent murder has become: it has lost its "extraordinary" trait (Baumeister, 1999).

[62]For example, interviews with acquaintances or relatives of the victim(s): in other words, whenever it is possible to create some sort of relation, of identification with the case (DeFife, 2010). It is not possible to relate with 100,000 deaths, because 100,000 is a number: reactions of shock and pity will be common (Watson, 1995; Zimbardo, 2007). It is much easier to identify with the detailed-saturated story of the ex-girlfriend massacred by a jealous partner (Bonn, 2014).

the killers, Perry[63], and how his execution left him devastated. Despite the impossibility of knowing the full details of his investigation, it is important to highlight evidence of what stated before: how a "standard" case of murder affects the lives of those involved in it. Even if the case is old (1959), and discrepancies concerning circumstantial events exist (Baumeister, 1999; Helliker, 2013) Capote's work, even with its embellishments (Baumeister, 1999; Linnemann, 2015) provides a very valuable and factually accurate portrayal of a brutal, yet surprisingly "mundane", murder case which is still controversial (Linnemann, 2015).

The book details the murder[64] of the Clutter family by Richard "Dick" Hickock and Perry Edward Smith. The burglary degenerated into a slaughter after the realisation the Clutter family possessed nothing of value; unfortunately, they were eyewitnesses (Capote, 1965). The killers were put on trial in 1960 and failed to plead for temporary insanity; they were both executed on April 16th, 1965 (Capote, 1965). Capote's portrayal of the victims describes them as pious, saint-like, "good" people (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013), ultimately morally superior to the entire town. The imagery used to describe them as American "racial" paragons[65] creates, in the reader, an idea of divine perfection (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013). The sharp contrast with the depiction of the killers creates a dissonance very much reminiscent of the third PE trait mentioned in Chapter 1: victims of PE are *always* innocent and good (Katz, 1988; Batson, 1991; Baumeister, 1999).

Hickock and Smith are good candidates for portraying the EP. They were neither extraordinary exemplars of evil nor psychotic serial killers, but rather two petty criminals who fell into a spiral of death and self-destruction by creating a situation bigger than them.

Hickock is described as really evil, because there is no logical explanation behind his actions: he is the "black sheep" of a respectable household, enjoyed a relatively "standard" childhood, devoid of major traumatic event or sadness (Capote, 1965). He was married and

[63]Said attachment has often been portrayed in movies (Pledger, 2013).

[64]November 14th, 1959, Kansas.

[65]In terms of physical appearance and household beliefs and behaviour (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013).

regularly employed: he had no reason to turn to crime, yet he did (Capote, 1965). Not only he did "look evil" due to an accidental deformity (Burris & Rempel, 2011; Pledger, 2013), he is described as a malevolent manipulator preying upon the weak-minded Smith through loving words and false affection, ultimately revealing he only considered him a pawn for his schemes (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013). He also exhibited paedophilic tendencies (Capote, 1965, Pledger, 2013), revealing that his main reason for choosing the Clutter family was the presence of a young girl who he had long fantasised about raping: "[…] Before I ever went to their house I knew there would be a girl there. I think the main reason I went there was not to rob them but to rape the girl. Because I thought a lot about it. […] I did make some advances toward the Clutter girl when I was there. But Perry never gave me a chance". (Capote, 1965: 278). On top of that he was portrayed as an unsympathetic man uncaring even of his mother's precarious health, aggravated – accordingly to her statement – by his crimes (Capote, 1965). He is, ultimately, portrayed as inherently, almost "naturally" evil (Pledger, 2013). Even if it was not his hand that actually killed the Clutter family (out of cowardice, rather than remorse), but Perry's, it is very difficult not to see Hickock as the actual mind behind the weapon (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013). On the crime scene, those are he said to Perry: "I promise you, honey, we'll blast hair all over them walls!" (Capote, 1965: 22)[66].

Perry Smith is depicted much more sympathetically as a puppet of the manipulative Hickock (Capote, 1965), despite being the actual murderer of the Clutter family. Perry, unlike Hickock, experienced a traumatic childhood, being a victim of physical and emotional abuse perpetrated by his father and (allegedly) by the nuns who ruled the orphanage where he was placed at age 13; during said time a caretaker also tried to drown him (Capote, 1965). With such an upbringing, it was surprising how stable he appeared at a superficial glance (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013). He was

[66]This bloodlust is described very well by Nietzsche (1950: 15): "Thus speaketh the red judge: "Why did this criminal commit murder? He meant to rob." I tell you, however, that his soul wanted blood, not booty: he thirsted for the happiness of the knife! But his weak reason understood not this madness, and it persuaded him. "What matter about blood!" it said; "wishest thou not, at least, to make booty thereby? Or take revenge?"And he hearkened unto his weak reason: like lead lay its words upon him—thereupon he robbed when he murdered. He did not mean to be ashamed of his madness". It is an almost uncontrollable urge, triggered by situational circumstances (Waxman, 2009; Bonn, 2014).

slightly deformed by birth, possessed a fertile, child-like imagination and related to the world with an almost touching naivety (Capote, 1965). Despite his low education, he had an interest in arts, poetry, literature[67] (Capote, 1965). Perry is both victim and victimiser (Capote, 1965): unlike Hickock, he never showed malevolent intent, since not only he prevented Hickock from raping the Clutter girl (Capote, 1965), but he also appears to be confused when trying to justify himself: "I don't know why (I did it) […] But it wasn't Dick. Or the fear of being identified […] And it wasn't because of anything the Clutters did. They never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it" (Capote, 1965: 290). Perry had no murderous intent, but he ended up being the executioner (Capote, 1965). This could have happened due to the toll the hardships of his life took on his judgement capabilities or, most likely, the companionship of a manipulator like Hickock zeroed his own judgement ability and motivated him to please his every whim out of fear of separation (Pledger, 2013). Without Hickock, Perry would probably have led a life of petty crime, but not of murder (Pledger, 2013).

If Smith and Hickock were to be evaluated by modern criteria, they would certainly be considered evil people: however, the additional diagnosis of psychopathy for Hickock and sociopathy for Perry[68] would have spared them the death penalty, with a number of exceptions, and perhaps granted the therapeutic assistance Capote himself hoped for (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013).

Capote's narrative[69] provides a good description of who the EP is: not an alien, not a creep lurking in the darkness, but rather the son of good parents, an average person who turned to a life of crime. The EP can also be the offspring of a problematic family, who had to fend off for himself too soon, without guidance, that could have been saved from a life of crime had he been provided with psychological support (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013). Thus, the EP is an individual of mixed,

[67]Hickock, in contrast, appeared to be a simpleton, a brute only guided by his bestial instincts.

[68]Since their descriptions fit the criteria mentioned in the previous chapter: Hickock is almost a prototypical psychopath, with no empathy and no remorse; Perry is more akin to a tortured soul, hardened by a difficult crime and thus, fitting the "learned psychopathy" profile.

[69]Despite its compassionate approach to Smith, who Capote befriended during the investigation (Capote, 1965; Pledger, 2013).

complex nature with significant "grey" areas in the blackness of his heart, qualified as evil due to his actions, rather than for an innate trait. This leads to the only possible conclusion: a "pure evil, demonic" person does not exist; but people that perpetrate evil acts do.

It is safe to assume that the concept of the EP is a social construct based on socio-cultural and historical factors: the most common contemporary EP stereotype is the Muslim terrorist, with beard and robes (Baumeister, 1999; Waller, 2002; Dillinger, 2004). It is tempting to believe the EP to be an alien (Kekes, 1998), a "thing" outside everyday reality and thus only very remotely encountered. Hitler, Stalin, Pinochet are all exemplars of less than ordinary people who perpetrated extraordinary. Normally, however, the EP is "merely" an ordinary person (such as a neighbour, or oneself) perpetrating evil actions (Waller, 2002; Allen, 2007). In other words (Baumeister, 1999: 5) "Ordinary, normal people have done a great many evil things, and sometimes the majority of those present have acquiesced. To understand evil, we must set aside the comfortable belief that we would never do anything wrong". It is also necessary to specify that an EP is not necessarily an "evildoer" (Russell, 2010a; Russell, 2010b): people have perpetrated evil actions for promoting "good" objectives[70] (Haybron, 2002). Zimbardo's famous Stanford prison experiment (1972) and Milgram's study on obedience (1963) highlight how "normal", ordinary people can, in specific situations, inflict harm and cruelty on other human beings. By either rationalisation[71] or situational stimulus[72], it was demonstrated how a "normal" was capable of causing pain and suffering to others, either due to "executing orders" or to the circumstances of the situation. Many would say "I'd never do it" but, evidence proves this potential lies in everyone (Milgram, 1963; Zimbardo, 1972; Zimbardo, 2007).

In order to understand if "essential characteristics" of the EP exist, is imperative to determine whether people are "born evil" or if they become so during their life (Burris & Rempel, 2011; Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014). The distinction is not merely academic: the existence of such a

[70]Historical example: witchcraft trials. Their purpose was to keep the community safe from evil influences, but they only accomplished a massacre of innocent women (Dillinger, 2004).

[71]Milgram's experiment had a reassuring, white coat doctor incite the subjects to inflict shock.

[72]Zimbardo's prison experiment ignited a deep role impersonation in its participants.

thing as an "endogenous factor of evil" in the human body, an element akin to hormones (Alper, 1998) would cause the criteria of judgement employed by society to schism, as the tools for diagnosing mental illness, for establishing criminal responsibility and even education would be obsolete. If, on the other hand, individuals become evil during their life, it would be paramount to identify what, exactly, causes the human heart to "blacken", and why said factor is of pandemic proportions, since no area of the world is devoid of evil or criminal behaviour (Ellens, 2011c). Waller's answer (2002) is the most clear and sensible: it is necessary to accept that each person has, within, the potential for both good and evil. It is also necessary to realise that human behaviour is influenced by both internal and external powers[73]: both factors influence the development of the persona, but rarely one, alone, will determine entirely if an individual will be evil.

Since, as of today, no "evil gene" or "criminal gene"[74] has been found[75] (Kaye, 2006; Walsh, 2009), it is preferable to say that biological and genetically-related factors correlated with *propensity* to criminality, violence and evil *do* exist. Testosterone, *the* male hormone, is deeply related to dominance, sexual desire, recklessness and aggressiveness mechanisms (Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999; Mazur, 2009). It is often said "boys will be boys" when trying to describe a childish, playful yet aggressive behaviour displayed by men of almost all ages; there is no equivalent phrase for girls (Burt, 2014). High levels of testosterone are associated with psychopathy and low levels of empathy (Blair, 2005; Hermans et al., 2006; Walsh, 2009). FBI arrest statistics show an overwhelming[76] majority of male arrests, compared to female ones (FBI, 2009). However, not all men are delinquent neither are all women saints (Beaver & Nedelec, 2014). As of today,

[73]Such as personal attitude and upbringing (Waller, 2002).

[74]Genes are a way for the human body to decode proteins; vulnerabilities to other situations (such as alcoholism or cancer) are the result of an allele mutation, and are anyway quite rare (Walsh, 2009). It is doubtful at best that such a thing will ever be found.

[75]Studies such as that of the "Dutch criminal family" (Alper, 1998) or the "Danish adoption study" have been proved as a mystifications and scientifically inaccurate (Kaye, 2006).

[76]E.g., 80% of murderers are male (FBI, 2009).

however, no decisive explanation[77] exists[78] (Beaver & Nedelec, 2014). Examining the concept across the various disciplines may help in identifying valuable insights.

In Christianity, the EP is the "sinner" (Zimbardo, 2007; Heller, 2011). As mentioned in the previous chapter, "sin" is not an objective concept: it merely means the transgression of divine law. It is also an essential trait of humanity: because of Adam and Eve's original sin (Seto, 2003), all of humanity is tainted[79] and prone to sin and offend God with immoral behaviour (Morton, 2004; Haksar, 2011). Not all sins are equal in the eyes of God: worst of all are the seven deadly sins[80] (Watson, 1995; Carlin, 2011). Consequentially, sinners have various "degrees of culpability"; Dante, in both his Hell and Purgatory, structures the layout of the afterlife accordingly to the culpability attributed to each sin: in Hell, lascivious sinners are at the top[81] while traitors[82] are at the bottom, with Lucifer himself. In Purgatory, the proud are considered to be the worst sinners, while the lustful are the closest one to salvation (Watson, 1995; Zimbardo, 2007). As such, it is clear that those that succumb to the pleasure of the flesh enjoy a relatively "lighter" penance and punishment, rather than those who perpetrate sins by abusing their free will and discernment: the sinner that strays from the path of virtue by succumbing to instinct (such as sexual instinct) is not considered to be as vile as one that actually commits a deliberate, intellectual effort in breaching God's law (such as a heretic, or a traitor). The New Testament, however, gives the chance of redemption through Jesus' sacrifice[83].

[77]The phenomenon is considered single most important fact that criminology theories must be able to explain" (Bernard et al., 2010: 299).

[78]And perhaps it will never exist, since it could be "beyond the scope of any available set of empirical data" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990:149).

[79]Even newborns, who are cleansed when baptised. The only exception is the Virgin Mary.

[80]Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Wrath, Envy, Sloth and Pride.

[81]The sin that damned them is not too despicable and, ultimately, involves giving in to human impulses without any real malice involved.

[82]To Dante, due to his own life experience, betrayal was the worst sin of all, being so deliberate and intentional.

[83]"Life according to the Christian religion is a progress toward the divine perfection […] Increase of life according to this consists in nothing but the quickening of the progress toward perfection. And therefore the progress toward perfection of the publican Zaccheus, of the woman who was a sinner, and of the robber on the cross, implies a higher degree of life than the stagnant righteousness of the Pharisee" (Tolstoy, 2006: 88).

Sin, therefore, is not automatically associated with the sinner: they both remain distinct and separate, and while the sin is despised, the sinner is loved and given the chance of redemption (Pugh, 2011a). Redemption, however, thanks to the gift of free will, is entirely voluntary: the sinner must feel guilty and struggle for repentance, and those that do not wish to repent are condemned to Hell, for eternity (Schwartz et al., 2011). Examining the case study with those criteria leads, of course, to a judgement of evil and sin: even murder, however, can be forgiven by God.

Therefore, theology acknowledges the existence of both evil and the EP as very much real, through "black and white" criteria: the sinner, until redemption, is evil and marked for damnation.

In law, the EP does not have a statutory definition. However, the concept most closely related to it is that of "criminal". The Encyclopaedia Britannica offers a very precise and concise definition of it: someone who has perpetrated a crime and\or one who has been convicted of a crime (2015b). The word "criminal", therefore, is more akin to a technical-functional definition[84] rather than a qualitative[85] one: to the eyes of the law, comparing someone who breaches a law concerning public morality and a murderer leads to evaluating both as criminals (Young, 1997). However, not all criminal activity is equal, therefore not all criminals are subject to the same punishment and intensity of judgement (Katz, 1988). Those principles are are essential traits of legislations across the world. Excluding aberrant legal phenomena like the criminalisation of homosexuality (Woo, 2014) statutory provisions for various crimes in Western States show a great deal of similarities and differences in terms of punishment and negative value associated with it. Prison sentences and fines are the most common state answers to criminal behaviour. Murder will most likely cause the infliction of a life sentence, while manslaughter can lead up long, but not life imprisonment because, unlike murder, there is no *intention to kill*, but death was inflicted almost *by accident*, or

[84]Assuming, of course, the observer is a law-abiding individual: to a criminal, another criminal is just another person (Young, 1997; Baumeister, 1999).

[85]Black (1991: 36), by quoting Diderot, gives a very compelling definition of the criminal and of criminal activity, emphasising the difference between low-profile and high-profile crimes: "If it is important to be sublime in anything, it is especially so in evil. You spit on a petty thief, but you cannot withhold a sort of respect from a great criminal. His courage bowls you over. His brutality makes you shudder."

due to negligence. Parking in a forbidden area causes, at most, a fine. Sometimes imprisonment and monetary punishments are combined: environmental or white-collar crimes feature both, in order to satisfy the necessity of both punishing the criminal and trying to deter others by seizing the profit of the crime, making the criminal act fruitless: e.g. insider dealing is punished by a "moderate imprisonment", but also with the seizure of all profits and very high fines. Then, aggravating and mitigating circumstances provide additional criteria for the judge and the jury to rely upon: acting out of necessity can lead to acquittal, being especially cruel leads to more severe sentences; being found insane puts the criminal outside of the standard system by prioritising the need for therapeutic help.

In contrast to religion, therefore, law operates a certain joint identification with the crime, the evil act; and the evil person, the criminal (Katz, 1988; Young, 1997; Baumeister, 1999). However, while the crime is always evil, the criminal is not always considered so, thanks to the above mentioned criteria[86]. While the behaviour is the object criminalised by the law, the treatment of the criminal cannot be separated from the attempt to undo the crime. Punishment, by either fine or incarceration, is more divine retribution: it has the social function to deter, educate[87] and show the consequences of criminal acts to society. The case study has already been examined extensively by the law: however, in the present era and by applying circumstances, it is possible to assume that an insanity plea would have be considered more carefully, thus voiding the EP necessity.

In psychiatry and psychology, the concept of "evil person", just like the concept of "evil" is approached very carefully, as it is either downright refused (Carey, 2005) because it would implicitly lead to an admission of impotence and failure of the discipline (being evil is not a

[86]E.g. the thief that steals a can of food because he has to feed his family and no money to pay: theft is always punished, but the thief could be exempted thanks to the circumstances.

[87]The educative and retributive duty of law and punishment is clearly explained by Kant (1887: 198): "Even if a Civil Society resolved to dissolve itself with the consent of all its members – as might be supposed in the case of a People inhabiting an island resolving to separate and scatter themselves throughout the whole world—the last Murderer lying in the prison ought to be executed before the resolution was carried out. This ought to be done in order that every one may realize the desert of his deeds, and that blood guiltiness may not remain upon the people; for otherwise they might all be regarded as participators in the murder as a public violation of Justice."

sickness, therefore no therapy can exist; Simon, 2003); or is met with an almost enthusiastic reaction, as the struggle to define evil and the EP accordingly to clinical criteria is, by many, considered as the ultimate achievement of the profession, the final step in bringing light to the darkest darkness (Welner, 2003). A tentative definition of the EP by forensic psychologist Paul Wilson (2003: 3) is: "'one who intentionally inflicts serious physical harm on another person or persons, in pursuit of a personal, ideological or religious goal, and who experiences intense psychological pleasure in doing so''. Knight (2007: 32) provides her own definition of evil people: "those who, with premeditation, act out perversely and sadistically their aggression on another who may symbolically represent earlier tormentors, whose aggression is particularly destructive, pathological and rooted in violent fantasies, and who obtain intense pleasure in doing so". However, those definitions are highly personalised: as mentioned in the previous chapter, far more common is the usage of words such as psychopath or sociopath, rather than "evil". The usage of those labels is controversial and hotly debated (Levin & Fox, 2008). Psychopath is considered to be the closest concept related to an idea of being "born evil"[88] accepted by the scientific community, since psychopathy is correlated with an aetiology deeply intertwined with the individual psychology, possibly due to genetic reasons (Waller, 2002; Wiebe, 2009; Hood, 2011): thus their numbers are low (1-3% of the male population; Walsh & Bolen, 2012). The sociopath, instead, is considered to be the result of environmental interactions on vulnerable subjects, who may already have a certain propensity to criminal activity but they feature no genetic, biological underlying mechanisms of psychopathy (Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004; Walsh & Bolen, 2012). As such, it is possible to say they are two facets of the same concept, both featuring an empathy deficit but different evolutionary paths (Walsh & Bolen, 2012). Of the two, the psychopath is most often associated with the idea of a remorseless, emotionless criminal that can literally move from one victim to the other without any qualm (the prototypical serial killer of popular culture, in short;

[88]"Born evil" or, to possess certain genetic factors that allow the development of psychopathy (Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

Walsh & Bolen, 2012). Psychopaths cannot understand other living being's emotions and reactions, and rely on second-hand interpretation and very elementary comprehension in order to interact. For this reason, their anti-social behaviour is very effective: not feeling guilt or remorse allows them to pursue their selfish interests without taking into account factors such as the judgement of others[89] (Wiebe, 2009). They might appear very lucid, however, even in their choice of words when trying to describe emotions and feelings[90]: verbalisation, however, does not imply an understanding[91].

"Criminal" psychopaths (being the ones most likely identified by the law enforcement and forensic services) cannot be "cured" in a traditional sense nor reasoned with, as they have no conscience to guide their steps, and are in fact only fuelled by their psychopathy and urges (Bonn, 2014). Together with low empathy this equates no possible qualm in unleashing themselves upon the world if they desire to, unless some advantage[92] for them motivates them to do so (Wiebe, 2009; Walsh & Bolen, 2012). It is only possible to restrain them, while at the same time recognising they are, in their own way, vulnerable subjects that are deserving of help, rather than just punishment (Schlesinger, 2008). Criminal psychiatric hospitals, in theory, satisfy both needs of retribution and care, by placing the criminally insane in safe environments[93]. However their actual effectiveness was more controversial than established (Baldry, 2009; Joubert & Joubert, 2011)

Psychopaths are detected very consistently throughout history (their low but constant number suggesting that the genetic-related theory is, in fact, solidly grounded; Walsh & Bolen, 2012) but are, in fact very rare. Their extremely high popularity in the collective imagery as paragons of evil is born due to their fit as a stereotypical EP.

On the other hand, the common criminal, especially the juvenile delinquent, is more likely to

[89]E.g. after having consummated rape, the psychopath will simply move to the next target because he literally cannot understand the pain and suffering of the victim (Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

[90]During interviews, for example, when they are required to describe their actions.

[91]As quoted in Dexter (2006 – 2013): "I see their pain. On some level I even understand their pain. I just can't feel their pain."

[92]Such as avoiding punishment (Bonn, 2014).

[93]For the safety of both the patient and society.

be classified as a sociopath[94]: a diagnosis of psychopathy would not be consistent with their low numbers and the essential traits of the psychopath. Morton (2004) provides a very clear image of the "typical"[95] sociopath: only a criminal can be classified as one (Walsh & Wu, 2008). They are persistent delinquents who, however, are not "born" or innate like psychopaths, but are the product of harsh, distorted socialisation and possibly traumatic childhoods interacting with genetic traits (Walsh & Bolen, 2012). Compared to the psychopath, the sociopath has an understanding of emotions (as they are not alien to him, he understands and feels): however, he has developed ways to ignore any non-advantageous emotions (such as pity due to a victim's wailing and begging; Wiebe, 2009; Walsh & Bolen, 2012; Walsh et al., 2014). Because of this, they are much more proficient at creating an illusion of concern, care and compassion (Waller, 2002; Walsh & Bolen, 2012) for the purpose of better blending into society. In light of this, sociopaths are not as rare as psychopaths but they are, potentially much more dangerous, due to their higher numbers and greater adaptability (Waller, 2004; Walsh & Wu, 2008; Wiebe, 2009; Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

Psychology and psychiatry's approach could be considered a middle ground between law and religion. First of all, a case-by-case evaluation is required before being able to diagnose, accordingly to criteria that are currently evolving and not set in stone. Each professional enjoys a high degree of discretionary power. The person, even if classified as a "vulnerable" psychopath or sociopath, is held responsible for its actions, but never disqualified as "evil" by the professional: priority is given to therapeutic, non-judgemental aid, even if it involves restraint and limitations of personal freedom. Referencing the case study and previous observations and criteria, it is reasonable to say that Hickock would have been considered a psychopath while Smith a sociopath, evil for the public but not for a professional (Pledger, 2013).

[94]Emphasising social and\or environmental factors (Waller, 2002; Hood, 2011).

[95]In a manner of speaking: each case is very much considered to be exceptional in its own right (Waller, 2002; Wiebe, 2009).

What Manner of Beast is the Evil One?

In light of the above analysis, there is only one possible answer to the interrogative "who is the EP": in order to know how the EP looks like, it is only necessary to grab a mirror and gaze upon the reflection (Russel, 2010a; Russel, 2010b). Each person has both potential for greatness and cruelty (Waller, 2002; Chicheng, 2014). Some are more vulnerable to the temptations of evil, but not all of them end up inflicting pain and suffering.

Ultimately, it is necessary to say that there is no such thing as the "evil, demonic person" (Cole, 2006). Individuals that perform acts of evil and that have evil thoughts exist, but they are not "things from other worlds" (Haybron, 2002), devilish beings featuring horns, bat wings and spiked tails: they are neighbours, friends, colleagues, bystanders, individuals that have good and evil within them. Struggle against the temptation to "give in" to evil is a fundamental, inalienable characteristic of being human: after all, what would be the merit in being able to overcome one's own evil impulses, if all human beings were born good?

The Seductions of Evil: why is Evil Alluring?

Considering how destructive is evil in its essence, and how there is no paradigm for the "evil person", but rather than common people perpetrate evil acts; the last point to analyse concerns *why*, in fact, evil is so tantalizing to the person, despite the legal consequences and its intrinsic riskiness (Watson, 1995; Baumeister, 1999). What makes evil seductive, desirable, pleasurable (Young, 1997; Dillinger, 2004; Phillips, 2004; Zimbardo, 2007; D'Cruze, 2007; Heller, 2011)? Human fascination with its darker side is not a novelty of modern time, but a well-known fact (Zimbardo, 2007). Violence, death, thrills; all those elements possess an almost sexual attractiveness (Baumeister, 1999; Charles & Egan, 2008; Bonn, 2014). It is not a randomised outcome of fate that horror, crime and violent fictions have been a favourite of the masses since ancient Greece (Morton, 2004): the public hungers to watch stories that capture its attention. Modern media have only been riding this wave, feeding said public scandals, murders and fictions overflowing with gory details that trap us in morbid fascination (Watson, 1995; Selzer, 1998; Baumeister, 1999; Picart & Greek, 2003; Bonn, 2014). According to the previous chapters, evil is a transcendent, almost omnipotent and omnipresent factor for mankind, and every person has the potential for evil in his heart, waiting for the right moment to erupt and consume it: thus, fascination with evil is inevitably "human".
The only possible answer is that evil, similarly to distorted self-righteousness (Watson, 1995) "feels good" (Steiner, 2002; Humbach, 2003; Calder, 2013): while the consequences of evil acts are unwanted and despised, the act itself has an undeniable appeal[96]. Therefore, animal behaviour can yet again not be considered: as horrific as certain animal attacks might be (such as seagulls targeting the eyeballs of baby seals; Mohdin, 2015) there is no sadistic pleasure in it nor deliberate intention. Efficient predatory instinct, no matter how "bestial" it might appear through the eyes of anthropomorphism, cannot be considered evil (Watson, 1995; Ellens, 2011a).

[96]As Baumeister points out, not unlike the "need" for drunkenness: people like being drunk, but hate the hungover (1999). It is the search for the good, inebriating feeling of drunkenness that reinforces drinking behaviour (Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

An Interdisciplinary approach to the Seductions of Evil

A biological foundation concerning the pleasure of evil behaviour does exist: as mentioned in the previous chapter, testosterone is associated with violence, sexuality, and general recklessness (Watson, 1995; Alper, 1998; Stein, 2000; Mazur, 2009). Individuals with high levels of said hormone are therefore more sensitive to the thrills of criminal, or merely risky, behaviour (which is not always a bad thing: a certain fearlessness is necessary for being a firefighter or a soldier, both socially useful and heroic professions; Fannin & Dobbs, 2003; Charles & Egan, 2008). However, it would be unwise to attribute inordinate importance to biology *alone*, because everybody would be addicted to the pleasure evil provides, upbringing and education are also primary factors when trying to stop the flow of evil acts. Zimbardo (2000) points out that this attractive sensory element is the first factor humans have to struggle against: by giving in to temptation *once*, the risk of descending the slippery slope is ever-present (the idea of "falling prey to evil" is an essential element of its imagery; Morton, 2004) (DePaulo & Wilson, 2010; Kopak & Sefiha, 2015). The necessity of "enjoying one's own evildoing" as a key factor for being an evildoer is not simply an element omnipresent in fiction (Baumeister, 1999) but it has been proved in real life, e.g. the description of the moment of killing by Ted Bundy[97] (Simon, 1999: 301):

> "You feel the last bit of breath leaving their body. You're looking into their eyes. A person in this situation is God! You then possess them and they shall be part of you, and the grounds where you kill them or leave them becomes sacred to you, and you will always be drawn back to them."

Another example is Peter Kürten, the Vampire of Düsseldorf[98]: he obtained extremely pleasure by violence, murder, arson and drinking the blood of his victims (Schlesinger, 2008). Jeffrey Dahmer,

[97]Ted Bundy has been described as the *almost* archetypal charismatic serial murderer: one who delights in the killing and who is completely remorseless; so much in fact he could be assimilated to an "evil incarnate" villain (Simon, 1999; Simon, 2003). Cases like him are extremely rare (Baumeister, 1999; Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004) as in fact several murderers has admitted not to have enjoyed the killing (Katz, 1988).

[98]1883 – 1931. Also known as the Monster of Düsseldorf, born into a poor family led by an abusive father, he strangled a 9-year old girl when he was 13 and, before his execution, perpetrated 9 murders and an unspecified number of sexual assaults. He never denied the sexual pleasure he gained from his crimes (Schlesinger, 2008).

the Milwaukee Cannibal, albeit in a more conflictual way, confessed to have been thrilled by his murders (Palermo, 2008). Even a "normal" person, such as a soldier, admits that killing feels incredible, equating it to an orgasm (Baumeister, 1999). Rapists have revealed enjoyment not of the sexual act *per se* (such as penetration), but of their infliction of pain and assurance of their dominance over the victim: in other words, sadistic pleasure (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999; Waller, 2002). All these cases share a common element: a very personal involvement in the act. Acts of genocide, for example, do not yield any pleasure at all (such as the Holocaust or the Rwandan massacre): perpetrators of said monstrous acts did not mention any kind of enjoyment (Waller, 2002; Knight, 2007). The pleasure of evil lies in the individual dimension, not in mass destruction[99], nor does it requires an "actual" involvement (e. g. an action). The kind of fascination found in watching the aftermath of a road accident or a natural disaster, for example, is fuelled by actually trying to eavesdrop, to enter the "crime scene" or the "disaster scene", to acquire grisly details and ultimately be involved; the event itself is just the root cause. Thus, *watching* is a motivator just as powerful as *acting* (Oleson, 2005; Kanazawa, 2009; Jacovina et al., 2010; Green, 2012). The allure of evil, therefore, works through *direct* and *indirect* experience.

After acknowledging that *criminal* behaviour does not equate to *evil* behaviour, it is necessary to detail more why illegal acts are so tempting and, ultimately, diffused worldwide. The attractiveness of crime has long been investigated by, among others (Simpson, 2000; Welner, 2003), Katz through his masterpiece, *Seductions of Crime* (1988): his work is still considered today one of the most valuable and accurate works detailing the topic (Kopak & Sefiha, 2015). It is focused on the phenomenological nature of crime and its emotional value for the criminal (the thrill, the excitement and, indeed, the *pleasure*; Baumeister, 1999). The key concept in order to understand the issue is two-fold. First of all, said behaviour determines one's own moral, social code of conduct

[99]With a number of exceptions, such as an arsonist or a mass murderer who are delighted in mass destruction (Baumeister, 1999; Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004; Knight, 2007). In fact, human reality is so complex that a universal rule applicable to everything and everyone simply does not exist.

(Turk, 1991), a way to define oneself by going beyond mere deviancy or "rebellious" phases (Katz, 1988) and taking a more powerful stance against "common people and society" – the criminal, especially the violent criminal, is not trying to be unconventionally different or to escape poverty[100], but is rather declaring his status in the "pecking order" of society, a quasi-declaration of otherness (Katz, 1988; Waller, 2002; Kopak & Sefiha, 2015). Secondly, the pleasure obtained by acting outside "morality or normal code of conducts" (Matza, 1969; Becker, 1969; Kopak & Sefiha, 2015) cannot be ignored: the appeal of criminal behaviour lies in it being criminal, the thrilling, rogue-like activity of breaking the law (Baumeister, 1999), rather than in the material gain (Katz, 1988; Walsh, 2010). Should the same act be legal, there would be no excitement. For example, stealing an object and taking it requires the same physical action: the mere act of grabbing and pocketing. And yet, taking an object from a "free" bench (such as a charity bench) is nowhere as satisfying as pocketing the very same object from the local store (Baumeister, 1999; Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004). Evidence of this can be found by scrutinising behaviour considered criminal, but of very limited "evilness"[101], such as shoplifting, petty theft or "inconsequential" vandalising[102]. Shoplifters and petty thieves highlight, in their narrations, their racing hearts during the act, the fear of being caught spicing everything up, the exhilarating sensation of having conquered the "booty" (Baumeister, 1999; Kopak & Sefiha, 2015). Of course, those sensations only last until capture: when confronted, shame and guilt appear to overwhelm the perpetrators, but they cannot quite cancel their excitement: the crimes would have continued in order to fully bask in the sensations, and a part of the mind will always feel longing for those sensations, should they stop (Baumeister, 1999).

Certain acts considered as *sinful* by religion or *immoral* by common moral standards also qualify as examples bound to be controversial: there is nothing inherently "evil" in being

[100]As stated many times, criminal behaviour is largely inefficient and very much too risky for the average person to become rich (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999): the only exception being White Collar Crime (Morton, 2004; Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

[101]What Katz calls "sneaky thrills" (1988).

[102]Such as painting graffiti over an underground wagon: serious vandalising, such as destruction of unique, non-replaceable Art pieces, is rightfully identified as monstrous (Zimbardo, 1995; Mazur, 2009; Walsh & Bolen, 2012).

promiscuous, homosexual, gluttonous, proud or vain: yet, Christianity, especially Catholicism, classifies all those as deadly sins, ultimately evil, requiring a confession in order to be cleansed from the soul (Zimbardo, 2007) and serious enough to bar said soul from achieving salvation should the person die before having repented. Those sensory experiences, while destructive to the self and others if excessively indulged into (Walsh & Bolen, 2012), are normally not harmful or malignant: the thrill, the excitement lies, similarly to criminal behaviour, in breaking the code of conduct; indeed, in "tasting the forbidden fruit", just like Adam and Eve did in the Genesis (Watson, 1995; Baumeister et al., 2001; Badiou & Hallward, 2002; Zimbardo, 2007; Earl, 2011). And they are certainly more satisfactory than other practices considered acceptable such as chastity, abstinence, prayer, "repentance", self-deprecation in favour of modesty: it is no mystery that sometimes religion appears to emphasise too much reflection and guilt on past mistakes, without rewarding enough positive behaviour and dismissing it as "by-the-book" conduct (Baumeister et al., 2001; Earl, 2011).

Heroes of Evil: Catharsis through Evil

In order to better scrutiny the fascination of the human being with evil, two fictional examples are useful: Hannibal Lecter and Dexter Morgan. This choice, among the substantial plethora of both real-life and fictional evildoers, is not arbitrary or random, as both characters have been able to catalyse approval, endorsement, fascination (Morton, 2004): in short, positive emotions that would not normally be associated with two lucidly insane serial killers, two "heroes of evil" (Young, 1997; Baumeister, 1999; Simpson, 2000; Picart & Greek, 2003; Welner, 2003; Zimbardo, 2007; Bonn, 2014). Turning to fictional characters, despite authoritative contrary opinion[103], is a deliberate choice. When trying to portray the horrendous, fact fiction and myth are blurred[104], overlap and intersect with each other (Picart & Greek, 2003). The average person is much more likely to be eyewitness to a fictional murder, than a real one, and thus most of the "knowledge" acquired derives from fiction and indirect reports, rather than real-life direct experience (Waller, 2002; Morton, 2004). Popular culture exercises, therefore, an influence too significant to simply ignore in favour of questionable "purism" devoted only to real-life examples (Turnau, 2004; Farrel, 2008). Victim's stories, in addition to that, possibly have the problem of being undeniably biased by their own perceptions (Baumeister, 1999; Morton, 2004), nor they feature the possibility of a greater scale confrontation. Popular fictional examples, instead, are known at a capillary level by a much larger base (Morton, 2004; Joubert & Joubert, 2011). They can also be analysed with real-life techniques (Oleson & MacKinnon, 2015) and feature a number of distinct advantages over real-life cases: being a product of imagination, authors tend to create them *exactly* as they envision them in

[103]"There is another side to my emphasis on facts. I have, mostly, resisted the constant temptation to illustrate key points with episodes from literature, movies, and other fictional entertainments. Many books on evil are filled with such illustrations and some do not even seem to regard as meaningful the difference between, say, something said by Macbeth versus something said by Ted Bundy. I concluded fairly early in the project, however, that because our cultural ideas about evil are so powerful and so discrepant from the actual psychology of the perpetrators, fictional illustrations were often worse than useless." (Baumeister, 1999: viii-ix). This opinion, despite being authoritative, is disagreed with: fiction is so widespread that ignoring its power is unwise.

[104]Especially if one considers the preponderance, in the mass media, of not only crime as a topic (fiction, entertainment; Joubert & Joubert, 2011; Oleson & MacKinnon, 2015) but also of hybrid "true crime" narrations: embellished narrations of true facts (Picart & Greek, 2003).

their mind. Thus, there are no unexplained shadows at the end of the narration and fictional villains involve fictional victims that cannot be traumatised by relieving painful memories (Simpson, 2000). Ultimately, wisdom has always been transmitted by narration and allegory. Therefore, fictional examples provide significant usefulness: “Our social lives and our politics are shaped by books, films, and legends; we learn history as a long thread of many stories. Stories can guide us or blind us” (Morton, 2004: 93).

Hannibal Lecter's (Harris, 1981; Harris, 1988; Harris, 1999; Harris, 2007) name is almost eponymous with evil and cannibalism (Watson, 1995), indissolubly associated with the visage of Sir Anthony Hopkins thanks to the success of “The Silence of the Lambs” (1991). Inspired by Dr. Alfredo Ballí Treviño**,** also known as “Dr. Salazar”, a convicted murderer who died in 2009 (Mail Online, 2013; Shapland, 2015), Lecter's popularity is immense (Picart & Greek, 2003) in no small part thanks to Hopkin's superb acting[105]. The character has evolved from a pure villain to an anti-hero (Harris, 1981; Harris, 1988; The Silence of the Lambs, 1991) due to the novels *Hannibal* (Harris, 1999) and *Hannibal Rising* (Harris, 2007) which explain and detail his traumatic origin. A Lithuanian aristocratic eyewitness, as a child, of the brutal murder and cannibalisation of his little sister Mischa by Nazi deserters who had kidnapped them, together with other children, and actually fed her remains to him. Emigrated in America, he becomes a brilliant, lucidly insane psychiatrist and serial killer, captured by the FBI and subsequently confined in an asylum (Harris, 1981). After many years, he meets FBI recruit Clarice Starling[106] (Harris, 1988; The Silence of the Lambs, 1991) and helps her catch the serial killer “Buffalo Bill”, but also exploiting said collaboration to escape the asylum, reaching Italy (Harris, 1999). Years later, after becoming the target of a vengeful victim, Mason Verger, Lecter returns to the US and not only manages to have him killed but also seduces a disgraced and disillusioned Clarice, suspended by the FBI, through a series of “therapeutic”

[105]Hopkin's portrayal has been consistently ranked as one of the best characters of all time (Entertainment Weekly's EW.com, 2010) and the n°1 movie villain (Filmsite.org, 2003). Lecter, ultimately, is undeniably popular, in both his book and movie portrayal.

[106]Mentored by Jack Crawford, who is a fictionalised Jack Katz (Picart, 2006).

encounters based on hypnosis and drugs. Those sessions, rather than transforming her into Mischa *per* Lecter's intent, free her from her own moral code and allow her to overcome her guilt and anger at her father's death. Together, they elope to Brazil and live "happily ever after".

Lecter's evil is almost "classical": in addition to his murders and crimes, there is corruption of good and lack of punishment. His personal traumatic tragedy, however, justifies his descent into evil.

Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall's TV portrayal; Dexter, 2006 – 2013) is a forensic analyst specialised in blood spatter of the Miami police. The foster child of a police officer, and adoptive brother of another, is also a serial killer (America's "Favourite" serial killer, accordingly to the series tag line; Dexter, 2006 – 2013; DeFife, 2010) who hunts down criminals who have escaped justice. The reason for his "Dark Passenger"[107] lies in a childhood trauma: he was eyewitness to the dismemberment of his mother, Laura (a collaborator of justice), by three men, with a chainsaw, inside a harbour container. Together with his elder brother (who also grows up as a serial killer, but much more savage) he was left to die in her blood, until he was rescued by his foster father, Harry (who had an affair with Laura). He develops a morbid fascination with blood because of this, keeping a single drop of blood of each victim between two microscope slides. Throughout the series his personality evolves, he marries and develops real affection for his wife, foster children and adopted sister, unthinkable for someone who, in his own words, is a sociopathic, completely emotionless individual (Dexter, 2006 – 2013; Firestone, 2010). Ultimately, however, his story ends in tragedy as his misplaced mercy causes a serial killer to escape and lands his sister in a coma. After tracking him down and euthanising his sister, Dexter opts for self-imposed exile, too horrified to hurt his loved ones due to his lifestyle.

Dexter's evil is more controversial than Lecter's: they share a background of tragedy, but Dexter evolves into an anti-hero, hunting other evildoers, and suffers punishment for his actions.

Both characters possess great charisma and physical attractiveness (Picart, 2006; Silva &

[107]The abstract anthropomorphism by which he calls his impulse to kill (Dexter, 2006 – 2013; Firestone, 2010).

Rousseau, 2013). Lecter, due to the author's written narration and Hopkin's performance, appears as an elegant aristocrat, an almost "perfect" being, well-mannered and perfectly urbane, with great taste and civil even when slaughtering, as none of his acts is rushed or loud; he almost glides through the air. He is also good-looking in a scary way, due to his red-pinpointed eyes (projecting an almost demonic imagery; Harris, 1999). Dexter, thanks to Michael C. Hall's persona, is the almost prototypical American jock, straight out of college: tall, blond, blue eyes, athletic, with a "killer" smile and a charming, magnetic personality (Dexter, 2006 – 2013). Both attract, in the fictional world, friends and colleagues, like many evildoers did in real-life (such as Ted Bundy, Bin Laden or Hitler; Watson, 1995; Winch, 2005; Zimbardo, 2007; Silva & Rousseau, 2013), even if they have no desire for company: their affability is only an illusion, a mask that hides their bestial side (Bonn, 2014). In fact, their eeriness *is* part of their attractiveness to real-life spectators: both characters have very strong sexual traits, almost vampiric-like (Dexter and his fascination with blood; Dexter, 2006 – 2013; Lecter features a remarkably Dracula-like appearance, with its elegance, demonic-looking eyes and unusually sharp teeth; Harris, 1988; Harris, 1999), which qualify them as almost demi-human (Oleson, 2005; Picart, 2006; Oleson, 2006a; Oleson, 2006b; Green, 2012). Their actions have ritualistic, sexual and otherworldly-like characteristics: Lecter's movements and intellectual capabilities are described as superhuman (Harris, 1999), being capable of ignoring pain inflicted to him, possessing great strength and always capable of employing his fullest intellectual capacity. Dexter's execution scenes are very much portrayed as ritual sacrifices, with the victim lying on his back, tied in transparent tape and Dexter stabbing them right in the heart, savouring every moment and even visibly sighing in relief (Green, 2012), very much like the aforementioned "orgasm sensation" of the real-life veteran.

The attractiveness of those characters, in addition to their eeriness, is also caused by their sympathetic traits, due to backgrounds of tragedy, which renders them similar to tragic heroes of quasi-Shakespearian descent (Dillinger, 2004): their tragic past somewhat redeems them, and provides a sort of "logical grounds" for their acts that (Carey, 2005). Despite their monstrous inner

selves and their bestial urges, the public tends to justify their actions through rationalisation (Picart & Greek, 2003), very similarly to what happens in real-life (Fizt-Gibbon, 2009). This is especially true in the case of Dexter, who seduces the public also thanks to his good looks façade of charming, adorable friendliness (Firestone, 2010). Who would not sympathise with a child who saw his mother (or sister) butchered in front of his eyes? Because of this, the public empathises with them and gasps in fear when law enforcement is at their heels: they do not *want* the character to be captured and face the consequences of his actions, they crave for more excitement and cheer the evil hero's escape, even admire him. It is a form of morbid fascination for the "bad guy" that audiences love to hate (or possibly hate to love)" (Silva & Rousseau, 2013: 70). Evil's seduction, therefore, is proved again to lie also in watching evil, in addition to perpetrating it: evil is scary or horrifying to see (like a car accident, or a crime scene), and yet the individual is hooked, he literally cannot gaze elsewhere, his attention is completely monopolised by the event.

It is clear, therefore, why the evil hero is so attractive to the human psyche: he is the modern, ultimate evolution of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Picart & Greek, 2003; Oleson, 2005). The tormented but charismatic individual that cuts through life like a sharp knife, pursuing his objective while being unconcerned with "inconsequential" matters such as good and evil because he has his own code, and follows his own law (Hugher-Hallet, 2004; Gregor, 2011); those that cross his way must either submit to his overwhelming will or perish.

Ultimately, fascination with the evil hero and his evil deeds, paired with the desire to see and know more, has also an extremely important function: it is cathartic (Heller, 1993; Silva & Rousseau, 2013). Aristotle himself postulated that watching drama could be therapeutic for a community prey to anxiety (Davis et al., 2001). Events of public violence, such as public executions or witchcraft pyres, notwithstanding their monstrosity, kept the "common folk's" aggressive instincts in check and "entertained" the population, not unlike the *panem et circensem*[108] of the

[108]Literally, "bread and games", locution used to portray the gladiator games, very violent and often fatal.

Roman Empire (Watson, 1995). And it is no secret that, if the medium is good, the public tends to react in a very empathic way with the adventures and adversities of characters with fear, shock, cheer (Snow, 1983). In an interesting parallel with the "mirror-neuron theory"[109] and its implications with imitative behaviour (Molenberghs et al., 2009), observing evil acts perpetrated by individuals the spectator can relate to, and secretly approves[110], from the perfectly safe couch of home, purifies the human heart from the impulse of doing evil (Bonn, 2014) and also allows the experiencing of fear without the actual danger (Davis Jr et al., 2001). This is even truer when those evil acts serve a "greater good", such as the murder of a criminal who has escaped justice by the "rogue cop" (Exline et al., 2003): few things are more satisfying than seeing punishment administered to those that deserve it, even if said punishment is carried out outside the law (Oleson & MacKinnon, 2015). This is what Lecter and Dexter, each one differently, do: Dexter, by his own words, only slaughters murders, paedophiles and other evil, rotten criminals that fit the Code of Harry[111]. Lecter evolves from a purely villainous serial killer to a evil hero who eats "rude people" and kills despicable ones, such as animal torturers or murderers (Harris, 1999; Harris, 2007). Both, in short, fulfil a "socially useful" function: they cleanse it from the scum. Paired with their tragic childhoods and difficult lives, it is hard not to empathise or root, and to a certain degree identify112, for them. The same kind of fascination and quasi-unanimous approval, for real-life similar subjects, is much rarer: Ted Bundy did indeed have a number of admirers, but they were few, most likely deranged, and some of them were infatuated women (Baumeister, 1999) .

This chapter aimed to demonstrate that fascination with evil is an undeniable part of the human being, since the potential for evil is in everyone. Despite appearing obvious, "generalised" fascination with "the forbidden" was scrutinised as well, by determining that the allure of criminal

[109]The theory which states how watching a movement makes one feel as if he was doing it as well (in other words, it explains why watching Tom Cruise run in *Mission Impossible* makes one feel as if he was running with him; Gazzola & Keysers, 2009; Keysers & Gazzola, 2010) .

[110]Phrases such as "that paedophile deserves to die, I'd do it", "give me five minutes with that scammer and he won't be able to harm again" are symptoms of an aggressiveness that is vented through fictional violence; more often than not through the actions of a character like Dexter (Katz, 1988; Baumeister, 1999; Haksar, 2011; Bonn, 2014).

[111]"It outlines that the killing must serve some purpose and that Dexter's victim deserves to die because they have violated 'innocent' people, usually by murdering them." (Houlihan, 2009: 114).

[112]It is not uncommon for this to happen: this is part of the catharsis, as the emotional involvement is essential for the process to complete, since the time of Aristotle (Davis et al., 2001; Firestone, 2010; Hood, 2011; Pagels, 2011).

or sinful behaviour lies, more often than not, with its “forbidden” trait, rather than in the evilness of the act itself. Afterwards it was tried to determine why doing and watching evil is so tantalising. Through the analysis of two significant fictional characters, it was demonstrated that not only doing evil, or forbidden acts, “feels good”. Watching evil yields the same emotion, but it also has an additional importance: by identifying with the fictional evil hero, the person is purified by his evil impulses because, through the on-screen character, actions that there would never be the courage to do in real life, notwithstanding the desire, are perpetrated: when Dexter stabs the child molester right in his heart, it is the spectator that “delivers justice” (Zimbardo, 2007; Oleson & MacKinnon, 2015). Ultimately, in addition to obvious charismatic and sexual alluring traits, human beings tend to side and identify with the evil hero because he is the final evolution that the person, in the deepest, darkest corner of his heart, would like to be: charismatic and determined, capable (and willing) to do what “mere humans” cannot.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was, as stated in the introduction, to shed some light on the problem of evil, by trying to understand what evil is, who the evil person is and why is evil so attractive for the human being to perpetrate.

Concerning the first interrogative, examined in Chapter 1, evil has been defined as a transcendent yet simultaneously immanent concept, greater than humanity but indissolubly intertwined with it; a hydra-like, multi-faceted cosmic entity, struggling against the opposite force of good. Efforts to find the "ultimate" definition do exist, but they are very much embryonic. Any future definition, however, will need to be as flexible as the concept is, as too restrictive criteria would void any usefulness of said definition.

Concerning the second interrogative, discussed in Chapter 2, it has been discussed that the "evil person" does not exist as an autonomous, inhuman entity, nor there are any criteria, easy or otherwise, for identifying one: each individual has, within, the potential for being a saint or a demon, good or evil. Hence, there is no "evil person", but there is the "person" that perpetrates evil acts. It has also been pointed out that insanity does not equate with evil, as a certain awareness is required for evil to exist: there is no evil outside reason. While evil can be perpetrated without intent, a madman cannot be considered evil, if he is truly not liable for his actions.

Concerning the third interrogative, scrutinised in Chapter 3, it has been argued that the reason evil is so tantalising is, in addition to the interest sparked by fascination with the horrific, due to how "good" it feels to perpetrate: indulging in the lowest instincts of humanity can be as satisfying as trying to always act accordingly to its highest principles. Petty shoplifting, for example, is exhilarating because it involves acting outside the bounds of what is permitted, rather than in the material profit or watch. Similarly, even murder has been described as an extremely sensory experience. Watching evil provides a very similar sensation: through sight, people experience sensations that could never be directly experienced by the majority of them. Fascination with evil is also related to the success of fictional evil heroes: the spectator empathises-identifies

with the hero, and "acts through him", perpetrating through this "avatar" actions that will never be executed in real life. This phenomenon has also a cathartic function, long recognised (ever since Greek drama), venting out evil impulses harmlessly. The evil hero, therefore, is also seen as a model to be inspired from, despite the fact that it shall never be reached (as it would imply crossing a forbidden gap and, ultimately, become evil).

As mentioned in the introduction, no definitive answer to the problem of evil was meant to be found, being it extremely complex and ever-changing. Understanding the essence of evil implies being able to understand human nature at an almost "molecular" level. However, the aims set in the introductions were met, as the answers found are satisfactory, despite their lack of definitiveness. Research on evil is bound to be a never-ending journey into darkness, but the difficulties encountered should not deter it, since confrontation with evil is inevitable. Evil, by its own nature, can only be contained and, sometimes, controlled, but it shall never be eradicated.

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