

# Toward anthropology of non-violence

Damn the science which  
does not turn into love.

Jacques Benigne Bousset

In love and in hate,  
in hope and in fear,  
in joy and in dismay,  
the traits of  
reality itself changed

Ernest Cassirer

To understand and explain<sup>1</sup>. This is the intention of my research. To make an effort and to make clear what “modern”<sup>2</sup> Europe deems to be the evil; to try to pick up the cultural point of view which permits us to understand the relationship that our people have towards themselves and toward the Other. Which ones people fear, its anxieties and how these feelings and emotions can create the reality. Yes, feeling, emotions and reality are closely related for us.

«With difficulty a society can endure the existence of evil, that it occurs and what makes it up but not without seeking some explanations. Evil without sense is too painful: to be in some way tolerable we need to find the “sense of the evil” and societies – none of which is without illness, disasters, calamities and finally from death – cannot help but seek the reasons, classification and solutions»<sup>3</sup>

To do this, or, understand the European evil I decided (and it constitutes the first chapter of this research) to go to the origin of the symbolical construction of classical Christian evil, which starts, from my sources, from the Middle Ages<sup>4</sup>, that is, from the fall of the Roman Empire to the discovery of America. That is, in that period of history, seen conventionally as between the V and XV century.

It is opportune to say that I could not consider all the panoramic literature about this topic. It is enough to think about this, to understand how wide this panoramic literature is: some say the Europeans have written more about Devil than God.

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1And not justified. A thing is try to understand and explain the reasons which a phenomenon exist and other thing is justified that phenomenon.

2We can agree with the contributions by Achille Mbembe and Bruno Latour. The first one, in his book *Postcolonialism*, put in crisis the points on which it is based the supposed modernity. The second one, in his book *We have never been modern*, say that the modernity it is never existed.

3Cfr. Pier Paolo Portinaro, *I concetti del male*, pag 148, contribute from Francesco Remotti, see the chapter about *Maleficio*.

4Historian Jacques Le Goff say that the Middle Ages marked an important date for the Christianity, because it extended its influence everywhere and its symbol are absorbed as never before.

With the phenomenon of Positivism, and even before the Enlightenment, there has been a long discussion on the *problem of evil* which saw the Devil sometimes redeemed and other times condemned., for example. Any list would be long and interesting. In this research I plan to examine just a small part of this huge reflection.

I have analysed the cultural, social, emotional and inner condition which permitted the European natives of the Middle Ages to build their vision of evil.

In this journey I understood that the Devil (Satan, Lucifer, the Enemy, the Demon, the Antichrist however we call it) had an important role as a figure that includes every human vice and worthlessness and so as symbol of every evil: the Evil. That this dark figure was exported through homilies from the church and that in these homilies, to talk about the Devil, they told and give as proof of the real operations of the Devil in the world the lives of the saints, whom, discovered the Devil in their bodies and in their minds.

I went then to research the life of these saints, because I was convinced that it was through their contemplative experiences that I would find the origin of the classic symbolism of evil.

I also analysed in the Middle Ages theology and took into consideration some theological perspective (the most original ones) which have drawn the journey of religious European thinking, its maturation, its evolution and so they represent both an example of biblical incorporation, both of which have become the European way to interpret the world from their own frameworks<sup>5</sup>.

The European and Christian Middle Ages, through the figure of evil, has revealed itself as the suitable historical place to rebuild the classical symbol of evil, our own evil vision, which still influences us nowadays (this is my point of view).

The *sense*<sup>6</sup> of guilt and the perception of an evil outside and menacing are the inheritance of a Middle Ages Europe far away in historical time, but always present in mythic time, that is the emotional time, that time which express the emotionality and which seems to be present in every culture.

The first chapter can be collocated in the historical anthropology, it is a small essay of historical anthropology on the reconstruction of the classical symbology evil in Christian religion.

The European vision of evil born (from my sources) in the Middle Ages and which kept its Luciferian grammar intact until nowadays through a biblical topos of evil that the psychoanalysis of Jung in the twentieth century describes as the archetypal Shadow.

So we reach the second chapter of the research in which I tried to link and develop, in the light of new research, the European vision of Middle Ages evil with the European vision of globalized evil. The contact point is the symbolic matrix of the Middle Ages: Middle Ages Europe and globalized Europe meet each other maybe in the body and in the unconscious, in the archetypes and in the genealogical trees. We enter in this way in the core of my theoretical proposal.

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<sup>5</sup>A way basically positivist even if it is anachronistic say this

<sup>6</sup>In its double sense of substantive and adjective

The original cultural framework through which we read the evil nowadays it is the same with which we read the evil in the Middle Ages. At this point I ask to myself the following question: could the anthropological studies on the body and the psychological ones on the archetypes, unconscious and trans-generational relations, be useful in some way?

Has the biblical tension link to the Devil been incorporated and transmitted in a trans-generational way as every tension is transmitted?

The familiar-parental aspect of the cultural construction came to us from the trans-generational psychology. I resumed the searches by Anne Ancelin Schützenberger (in which they retrace the studies and reflections of people like Jacob Moreno, Joséphine Hilgard, Nicholas Abraham, Maria Török and Francoise Dolto<sup>7</sup> and which were enriched from Schützenberger with her personal experience of therapist) because I am persuaded that this perspective can help to answer a question which is crucial in anthropology: how does the human animal work? What is its nature beyond the cultural diversities which construct its own nature? It is an animal which has cultural needs. Why? What is it trying to express in its own cultural expressions? Why are men and culture so indissolubly linked to the point that he finds his deep nature in the construction of his own nature, of Self? Why all of the above? That is why I deem *how the human animal works* to be crucial.

As a herpetologist study snakes, as an ornithologist study birds, like any other zoologist the anthropologist study the human animal. In this way we have to consider the man, a highly evolved animal.

What I propose here, de facto, is a probable reading of the mechanisms which make possible the psycho-social phenomenon of evil, or, that which brutalizes man.

In her searches, the French psychologist Schützenberger, asserts that the life of each of us is a riveting novel. We are “prisoners” of invisible links which bring us to repeat the wrongs, the accidents, the misfortunes and the dissatisfactions of those who came before us. We are an inseparable part of our genealogical tree by which we share the unfinished destinies of our parents and ancestors.

A trauma is experienced and often comes out into the open after one or two generations. There are ancient traumas linked to the history and that have made history. It is as if something which was not understood before has to be understood now.

«In a way of which they were unaware, our parents, our grandparents, our ancestors, leave in us unfinished problems, traumas not “digested”, unspeakable secrets. When things are not saying, the body – its yes – has to express them: this is the somatisation. The body of the baby – son, nephew or grandnephew as you prefer – whatever his age, transforms itself into the voice of the injured ancestor, into the “word” of its trauma». It is necessary thus, in this perspective, to «“pull out the skeleton from the cupboard”, decipher the injuries not yet healed and to take care of them, to get free – of the end – from the “cold” that they brought inside us»<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>Cfr. Anne Ancelin Schützenberger, *The ancestor syndrome*. She made a list about all of them

<sup>8</sup>Cfr A. A. Schützenberger, *Una malattia chiamata genitori*

The genealogical prospective suggest that the life of each of us has a system, then. It can seem unfair, on its own, to repeat in our lives the wrongs which belong to another, but it is fair to the system: if there are imbalances in the genealogical tree someone has to rebalance them or those imbalances will repeat themselves from generation to generation.

How does all the above happen? Maybe we can find the answer in anthropology. This teaches us that the body of the human animal is its tool for being, the natural tool in which shape we exist and represent our self. It is *in the* body that we make experience of the world and it is *through* the body that we represent ourselves.

Anthropology teaches us that the body has the capacity to absorb knowledge, embody the world: incorporate it. Also the historical and family past? Maybe. The history embodied in the body<sup>9</sup> say Le Goff.

There is the concrete proof that the history entered into our bodies came from the paragraph about Jung's Shadow, syzygy and Self.

With his contribution I tried to show that the Middle Ages Devil represented part of us, because it is none other than the Shadow which we won't integrate in our lives.

Devil represents the idiom through which Europeans had tried to manage the disorder of their lives, which they felt was harmful and painful and which were translated from Jung, in a psychoanalytic way, like archetype Shadow.

In the archetype above, but more in those of syzygy and Self, we discover residues of the Christian religion, because we came from it, and it is with its symbolic matter that we Europeans build our "common archetypes".

So, the second chapter is organized in two paragraphs and two subparagraphs. The first paragraph looks in part at the anthropology of the body (subparagraph 1.1) and in part the psychoanalytic anthropology (subparagraph 1.2). In the second one instead I propose a further reading of the psycho-social phenomenon evil (of how anthropology should consider it) the prospective of the trans-generational transmission of which Schützenberger talks.

In the third chapter, with the help of social psychology, I tried to observe the phenomenon of evil from the situational prospective, that is, I tried to explain how the human animal, in unusual situations and in which it has no past experiences for orienting its self, may fall prey to its psychic automatisms and perform violent, inhuman and degrading actions which it would never have thought to perform.

So in the last part I use the psycho-social tools for explain more the complicated phenomenon of evil.

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<sup>9</sup>In Italian would be like this: the history "takes body" in the body, but I was not able to translate it in other way.

## Enquiry methods

(short summary of how the methodology for data collection was built and devolved.)

In the research work we see from where the Devil depicting evil came from. This dark Lord, in the European language, represents the modality through which we had read to us and the others and the existential tensions linked to the body, the first and more natural tool that the human animal hold.

We understood that evil is a cultural construction, that as every construction born from experience (the ascetical lives of the saints) articulates an idiom which we need to interpret and to make sense of it. This construction we collocated it in the Middle Ages, because like Le Goff say is within that historical period that Christianity found the suitable soil to propagate itself and establish within the conscience of its symbolism.

It is within Christianity that the figure of evil (rising strongly as the dilemma between Christ and Antichrist, John «fell into a trance» would organize his visions in the Apocalypse) is amplified symbolically and even more incorporated.

Jung, to give an example, detects many Christian symbols in the mind of his patients: the archetype of the fishes, of Christ, of God, of the Shadow-Devil, of the syzygy.

The unconscious has good memory and nowadays – like yesterday in the Middle Ages – evil is outside somewhere. There is the actuality of who is good and who is bad.

We also see that bringing experiences into us it is possible, even for long time: 1) through the contributions by anthropology of the body, 2) through the studies by psycho-genealogy and 3) through the studies by Carl G. Jung.

All of the above are extraordinary data which may go to influence the construction of the culture and us a last analysis.

We had observed then some historical cases of violence and inhuman and degrading behaviour. This time the data came from social-psychology enriching the cultural, bodily and trans-generational panorama of evil, with the influence of the “situation” and the group processes.

With all of the above heterogeneous material, which it is necessary to study the human animal, I wanted to deepen the idea of evil that I had worked out years ago and which life today seems to confirm. The idea is that: neither Goodness nor Evil exist as such until we make them exist. Goodness and Evil do not exist as opposite strengths which fight each other, they are not two *opposites* but rather two *distinct* things. Neither goodness nor evil exist but just actions which are classified as “good” or “evil” and this classification depends on the grade of awareness, acceptance and reception that we give to such actions.

We are paradoxically the authors of our own inescapable destinies. Why? Because, say Jung, «everything which does not rise up to the level of consciousness becomes a destiny<sup>10</sup>». “In the good and in the evil” and to us it is the last one that is of interest.

Anthropology in this journey it is central! This discipline does not limit itself to taking in as considerations just as it pleases and its visions, which are men and women’s construction. It is instead through the studies of the Other’s visions, of other cultures (and of other sciences, that is why the use of psychology, history and theology), of worlds outside its world which makes it able to understand its own world. Anthropology is the study of the human animal, of the *anthropòs*, so understanding its nature is the core of this science. That is what I think. It persuaded me that anthropology is better than other science to understand the nature of the human animal<sup>11</sup>.

For reasons of scientific rigour I took a vision of evil, the one nearest to me, evil in the European culture<sup>12</sup>.

The ultimate aim and the most important is to demonstrate that the human animal should never be, how say, punished or commiserate, excluded or removed, and above all it should never be judged, but instead understood, accepted and welcomed.

I am an anthropologist and so a zoologist. As every other zoologist would never dream of judging or send to jail a monkey or an ostrich for their behaviour, an anthropologist should not judge the human animal.

Behind this idea there is a grave ethical question (just because we are human animal) that I express with this question: is it ethical to judge or send to jail a man or a woman of whom we did not understand the reasons for their behaviour?

## **Expected results**

(Toward anthropology of nonviolence)

At the end of the research there emerges a physiognomy of evil less marked, less sharp than we could hope.

The gap between “goodness” and “evil” thins, there are no “good” or “bad” people anymore, but just men and women who live within a crossroad of systems, symbols, myths, cultural and family, from which they are moulded and cannot escape, because both culture and family penetrate into the body.

So evil is not a guilt but a burden which we suffer? The “worst” among men never perform atrocities to *pure*<sup>13</sup> pleasure or will, but for a combination of *sensible* facts. **The irony of life is that it is not just from**

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<sup>10</sup>We will continuous to find our self in a room, crying the dissatisfactions of the life; to feel fear of the water, of the animals or of the open spaces. We’ll continuous to have bad relationships with our parents, our children, or partner, or friends; problems with the food, with our body. We’ll continuous to feel in guilty or to be the cynics chronic. We’ll continuous to fight each other, make wars and more else until we’ll do not leave that all of the above rise up to the level of consciousness and it finished to be a destiny which determinate us.

<sup>11</sup>Obviously this is an open question. We have no proof currently about the own nature of the human animal. Anyway this is a my proposal. I believe that the human animal has its own nature and that nature take different shapes and these different shapes are the different cultures.

<sup>12</sup>This culture, which is made from many other cultures, share the same symbolic evil through the Christianity, that is why we can talk about a “European culture” when we talk about evil

their ignorance about them that they gain strength and are driven inescapably to evil or to the good, (but we are interested in evil this time).

This burden that we carry comes from (this has been my proposal) a combination of culture (the constructions of the realities, of Us and of the Other, and of all those customs, traditions and myths which generated collective archetypes about malicious strengths), of family (the family histories which came before us), of situations (new circumstances which disoriented the individual and left it without those defense instruments which usually came from culture and family education).

There is an “exit door” to evil anyway. We are not determined by this combination of culture, family and situation. Of course it is viscous and difficult to remove, but we can do, we can free our self from this combination to some extent and choose what do about our own life.

The solution we found is in *feeling* and in *practice* of “presence”. Being present to yourself, being careful to what happens around and within us could be an extraordinary and efficacious antidote, a counter-poison against the “banality of evil”<sup>14</sup>.

Because yes, the evil is banal, “common to whole village”, devoid of exceptionality, like goodness. They are not performed by people who are particularly special, but instead from people who are “terribly normal”.

That is why being *present* is important, to know what we are doing.

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<sup>13</sup>To “pure” we have to intend an intimate desire, a yearning of the being. Now, who can say that a man or woman performed violent, inhuman and degraded actions for pure pleasure? There is no in history a man or woman like that.

<sup>14</sup>I took this term, this expression obviously from the philosopher Hannah Arendt, *A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Trad. It. (La banalità del male, Milano, Mondadori, 2009).