

Evil and the Power of Thought

GA 207

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Translator Unknown

If an oriental sage of early times, who had been initiated into the Mysteries of the ancient East, were to turn his glance towards modern Western civilisation, he might perhaps say to its representatives: “You are living entirely in fear; your whole mood of soul is governed by fear. All that you do, as well as all that you feel, is saturated with fear and its reverberations in the most important moments of life. And since fear is closely related to hatred, so hatred plays a great part in your whole civilisation.”

Let us make this quite clear. I mean a sage of the ancient Eastern civilisation would speak thus if he stood again to-day among Western people with the same standard of education, the same mood of soul, as those of his own ancient time. And he would make it plain that in his time and his country civilisation was founded on a quite different basis. He would probably say: “In my days, fear played no part in civilised life. Whenever we were concerned to promulgate a world-conception and let action and social life spring from it, the main thing was joy — joy which could be enhanced to the point of a complete giving of oneself in love to the world.” That is how he would put it, and in so doing he would indicate (if he were rightly understood) what were from his point of view supremely important constituent factors and impulses of modern civilisation. And if we knew how to listen to him in the right way, we should gain much that we need to know in order to find a starting point for trying to get a grip on modern life.

In fact, an echo of the ancient civilisation still persists in Asia, even though strong European influences have been absorbed into its religious, æsthetic, scientific and social life. This ancient civilisation is in decline, and when the ancient oriental sage says, “Love was the fundamental force of the ancient oriental culture,” then it must certainly be admitted that but little of this love can be traced directly in the present. But one who is able to discern it can perceive even now, in the phenomena of decline of the Asiatic culture, the penetration of this primeval element of joy — delight in the world and love for the world.

In those ancient times there was in the Orient little of what was afterwards required of man when that word resounded which found its most radical expression in the Greek saying, “Know thyself!” This

“Know thyself” entered the historical life of man only when the early Greek civilisation set in. The old eastern world-picture, wide-ranging and light-filled, was not yet permeated by this kind of human knowledge; it was in no way orientated towards directing man's glance into his own inner being.

In this respect man is dependent on the circumstances prevailing in his environment. The ancient oriental civilisation was founded under a different influence from the sun's light, and its earthly circumstances were also different from those of Western civilisation. In the ancient East, man's inner glance was captured by all that he experienced in the surrounding world, and he had a special motive for giving over his entire being to it. It was cosmic knowledge that wove in the ancient oriental wisdom, and in the world-conception that owed its origin to this wisdom. Even in the Mysteries themselves — you can infer this from all you have been hearing for many years — in all that lived in the Mysteries of the East there was no fulfilment of the challenge, “Know thyself!” On the contrary — “Turn your gaze outwards towards the world and endeavour to let that approach you which is hidden in the depths of cosmic phenomena!” — that is how the precept of the ancient Oriental civilisation would have been expressed.

The teachers and pupils of the Mysteries were compelled, however, to turn their glance to the inner being of man when the Asiatic civilisation began to spread westwards; as soon, indeed, as Mystery colonies were founded in Egypt and in North Africa. But particularly when the Mysteries began to develop their colonies still further to the west — a special centre was ancient Ireland — then the teachers and pupils of the Mysteries coming over from Asia were faced, by virtue of the geographical features of the West and its entirely different elemental configuration, with the necessity of cultivating self-knowledge and a true inner vision. And simply because these Mystery pupils, when still living in Asia, had acquired knowledge of the outer world and of the spiritual facts and beings lying behind the outer world — simply by the strength of this fact, they were now able to penetrate deeply into all that exists in man's innermost being.

Over there in Asia all this could not have been observed and studied at all. The inward-turning glance would have been paralysed, so to speak. But by means of all that the men of the East brought to the Western Mystery centres, their gaze having long been directed outwards so as to penetrate into the spiritual worlds, they were now enabled to pierce through into man's inner being. And it was only the strongest souls who could endure what they perceived.

We can indeed realise when an impression was produced by this self-knowledge on the teachers and pupils of the Oriental Mysteries if we repeat a precept which was addressed to the pupils over and over again by the teachers who had already cultivated that vision of man's inner being, a precept which was to make clear to them in what mood of soul this self-knowledge was to be approached. The precept I mean is frequently quoted. But in its full weight it was uttered only in the older Mystery colonies of Egypt, North Africa and Ireland as a preparation for the pupil and as a reminder for every Initiate in regard to the experiences of man's inner being. The precept runs thus: “No-one who is not initiated in the sacred Mysteries should learn to know the secrets of man's innermost being; to utter these secrets in

the presence of a non-Initiate is inadmissible; for the mouth uttering these secrets then lays the burden of sin upon itself; likewise does the ear burden itself with sin when it hearkens to those secrets.”

Time and again this precept was uttered from out of the inner experience to which a man, prepared by Oriental wisdom, was able to attain when he penetrated, by virtue of the terrestrial configuration of the West, to the knowledge of man. Tradition has preserved this precept, and to-day it is still repeated — without any understanding of its intrinsic nature — in the secret orders and secret societies of the West which, externally, still have a great influence. But it is repeated only from tradition. It is not uttered with the necessary weight, for those who use it do not really know what it signifies. Yet even in our own time this word is used as a kind of motto in the secret societies of the West: “There are secrets concerning man's inner being that can be transmitted to men only within the secret societies; for otherwise the mouth uttering them is sinful, and the ear hearing them is likewise sinful.”

We should be aware that in the course of time many men in Western countries (I am not speaking of Central Europe) learn to know in secret societies what has been handed down as tradition from the researches of the ancient wisdom. It is received without understanding, although as an impulse it often flows into action. In later centuries after about the middle of the 15th century — the human constitution became such as to make it impossible to see these things in their original form; they could be understood only intellectually. Ideas about them could be picked up, but a true experience of them could not be attained, though individuals had some inkling of it.

Such men have sometimes adopted strange forms of outer life, as for instance Bulwer Lytton, the author of “Zanoni.” What he became in his later life can be understood only if one is aware of how he received, to begin with, the tradition of self-knowledge, but how, too, by virtue of his individual constitution, he was also able to penetrate into certain mysteries. Thereby he became estranged from the ordinary ways of life. Precisely in him one can observe what a man's attitude towards life becomes when he admits into his inner experience this different spiritual world; not only into his thoughts, but into his whole soul. Many facts must then be judged by other than conventional standards.

Of course, it was something quite outlandish when Bulwer travelled about, speaking of his inner experiences with a certain emphasis, while a young person who accompanied him played a harp-like instrument, for he needed to have this harp-music in between the passages of his talk. Here and there he appeared in gatherings where everything else went on in a quiet formal, conventional way. He would come on in his rather eccentric garb and sit down, with his harp-maiden seated in front of his knees. He would speak a few sentences; then the harp-maiden would play; then he would continue his talk, and the maiden would play again. Thus something coquettish in a higher sense of the word — one cannot help characterising it in this way at first — was introduced into the conventional world where Philistinism has made such increasing inroads, above all since the middle of the 15th century.

Men have little idea of the degree of Philistinism into which they have grown; they have less and less idea of it just because it comes to seem natural. They see something as reasonable only in so far as it is in line with what is “done.” But things in life are all interconnected, and the dryness and sleepiness of

modern times, the relation human beings now have to one another, belongs to the intellectual development of the last few centuries. The two things belong together. A man like Bulwer, of course, did not fit into such a development; one can quite well picture to oneself people of older times travelling about in the world accompanied by a younger person with some pleasant music. One needs only to perceive the distance between one attitude of soul and another; then such a thing will be seen in the right light. But with Bulwer it was because something lit up in him that could no longer exist directly in the immediate present, but appeared only as a tradition in the modern intellectual age.

We must, however, recover the knowledge of man that lived in the Mystery colonies of which I have spoken. The average man to-day is aware of the world around him by means of his sense-perceptions. What he sees, he orders and arranges in his mind. Then he looks also into his own inner being. The sense-perceptions received from outside, the ideas developed therefrom, these ideas as they penetrate within becoming transformed by impulses of feeling and of will, together with all that is reflected into consciousness as memories — here we have what forms the content of the soul, the content of life in which modern man lives and out of which he acts. At most he is led by a false kind of mysticism to ask: “What is there really in my inner being? What does self-knowledge yield?” In raising such questions he wants to find the answers in his ordinary consciousness. But this ordinary consciousness gives him only what originated in external sense-perceptions and has been transformed by feeling and will. One finds only the reflections, the mirror-pictures, of external life, when looking into one's inner being with ordinary consciousness; and although the outer impressions are transformed by feeling and will, man is still unable to tell how feeling and will are actually working. For this reason he often fails to recognise what he perceives in his inner being as a transformed reflection of the outer world, and takes it, perhaps, as a special message from the divine eternal world. But this is not so. What presents itself to the ordinary consciousness of modern man as self-knowledge is only the transformed outer world, which is reflected out of man's inner being into his consciousness.

If man really and truly desired to look into his innermost being, then he would be obliged — I have often used this image — to break the inner mirror. Our inner being is indeed like a mirror. We gaze on the outer world. Here are the outer sense-perceptions. We link conceptions to them. These conceptions are then reflected by our inner being. By looking into our inner being we get only to this mirror within. We perceive what is reflected by the memory-mirror. We are just as unable to penetrate into man's inner being with ordinary consciousness as we are to look behind a mirror without breaking it. This, however, is precisely what was brought about in the preparatory stage of the ancient way of Eastern wisdom so that the teachers and pupils of the Mystery colonies that came to the West could penetrate directly through the memories into the innermost being of man. Out of what they saw they afterwards uttered those words which were meant to convey that one must be well prepared — above all in those ancient times — if one desired to direct one's glance to the inner being of man. For what does one then behold within?

There, one perceives how something of the power which belongs to perception and thought, and is developed in front of the memory-mirror, penetrates below this memory-mirror. Thoughts penetrate below the memory-mirror and work into the human etheric body — into that part of the etheric body which forms the basis of growth, but which is equally the source of the forces of will. As we look out into the sunlit space and survey all that we receive through our sense-perceptions, there radiates into our inner being something which on the one hand becomes memory-ideas, but also trickles through the memory-mirror, permeating it just as the processes of growth, nutrition and so on permeate us.

The thought-forces penetrate first through the etheric body, and the etheric body, permeated in this way by the thought-forces, works in a very special manner on the physical body. Thereupon a complete transformation sets in of that material existence which is within the physical body of man. In the outer world, matter is nowhere completely destroyed. This is why modern philosophy and science speak of the conservation of matter. But this law of the conservation of matter is valid only for the outer world. Within the human being, matter is completely dissolved into nothingness. The very being of matter is destroyed. It is precisely upon this fact that our human nature is based: upon being able to throw back matter into chaos, to destroy matter utterly, within that sphere which lies deeper than memory.

This is what was pointed out to the Mystery pupils who were led from the East into the Mystery colonies of the West, and especially of Ireland. “In your inner nature, below the powers of memory, you bear within you something that works destructively, and without it you would not have developed the power of thought, for you have to develop thought by permeating the etheric body with thought-forces. But an etheric body thus permeated with thought-forces works on the physical body in such a way as to throw its matter into chaos and to destroy it.”

If, therefore, a person ventures into this inner being of man with the same frame of mind with which he penetrates as far as memory, then he enters a realm where the being of man has an impulse to destroy, to blot out, that which exists there in material form. For the purpose of developing our human, thought-filled Ego we all bear within us, below the memory-mirror, a fury of destruction, a fury of dissolution, in respect of matter. There is no human self-knowledge which does not point with every possible emphasis towards this inner human fact.

For this reason, whoever has had to learn of the presence of this centre of destruction in the inner being of man must take an interest in the development of the spirit. With all intensity he must be able to say to himself: Spirit must exist, and for the sake of the maintenance of the spirit matter may be extinguished.

It is only after one has spoken to mankind for many years of the interests connected with spiritual scientific investigation that one can draw attention to what actually exists within man. But to-day we *must* do so, for otherwise man would consider himself to be something different from what he really is within Western civilisation. Enclosed within him he has a fiery centre of destruction, and in truth the forces of decline can be transformed into forces of ascent only if he becomes conscious of this fact.

What would happen if men should not be led by Spiritual Science to this awareness? In the developments of our time we can see already what would happen. This centre which is isolated in man, and should work only *within* him, at the one single spot within, where matter is thrown back into chaos, now breaks out and penetrates into human instincts. That is what will happen to Western civilisation; yes, and to the civilisation of the whole Earth. This is evidenced by all the destructive forces appearing to-day — in the East of Europe, for instance. It is a fury of destruction thrust out of the inner being of man into the outer world; and in the future man will be able to find his bearings in regard to what thus penetrates into his instincts only when a true knowledge of the human being once again prevails, when we become aware once more of this human centre of destruction within — a centre, however, which *must* be there for the sake of the development of human thought. For this strength of thought that man needs in order that he may have a world-conception in keeping with our time — this strength of thought, which must be there in front of the memory-mirror, brings about the continuation of thought into the etheric body. And the etheric body thus permeated by thought works destructively upon the physical body. This centre of destruction within modern Western man is a fact, and knowledge merely draws attention to it. If the centre of destruction is there without any awareness of it, this is much worse than if man takes full cognisance of it, and from this conscious standpoint enters into the development of modern civilisation.

It was fear that seized upon the pupils of these Mystery colonies when they first heard of these secrets. This fear they learnt to know thoroughly. They became thoroughly acquainted with the feeling that a penetration into man's innermost being — not frivolously in the sense of a nebulous mysticism but undertaken in all sincerity — must arouse fear. And this fear felt by the ancient Mystery pupils of the West was overcome only by disclosing to them the whole weight of the facts. Then they were able to conquer by consciousness what arose in them as fear.

When the age of intellectualism set in, this same fear became unconscious, and as unconscious fear it still exists. Under all manner of masks it works into outer life. It belongs, however, to our time to penetrate into man's inner being. “Know thyself” has become a rightful demand. It was by a deliberate calling forth of fear, followed by an overcoming of it, that the Mystery pupils were directed to self-knowledge in the true way.

The age of intellectualism dulled the sight of what lay in man's inner being, but it was unable to do away with the fear. Thus it came about that man was and still is influenced by this unconscious fear to the degree of saying, “There is nothing at all in the human being that transcends birth and death.” He is afraid of penetrating deeper than this life of memory, this ordinary life of thought which maintains its course, after all, only between birth and death. He is afraid to look down into that which is eternal in the human soul, and from out of this fear he postulates the doctrine that there is nothing at all outside this life between birth and death. Modern materialism has arisen out of fear, without men having the

slightest idea of this. The modern materialistic world-conception is a product of fear and anxiety (*Angst*).

So this fear lives on in the outer actions of men, in the social structure, in the course of history since the middle of the 15th century, and especially in the 19th century materialistic world-conception. Why did these men become materialists — why would they admit only the external, that which is given in material existence? Because they feared to descend into the depths of man.

This is what the ancient Oriental sage would have wished to express from out of his knowledge by saying: “You modern Westerners live entirely steeped in fear. You found your social order upon fear; you create your arts out of fear; your materialistic world-conception has been born from fear. You and the successors of those who in my time founded the ancient Oriental world-conception, although they have come into decadence now — you and these men of Asia will never understand one another, because after all with the Asiatic people everything sprang ultimately from love; with you everything originates in fear mixed with hate.”

These are strong words indeed, but I prefer to try to place the facts before you as an utterance from the lips of an Oriental sage. It will perhaps be believed that he could speak in such a manner if he came back, whereas a modern man might be considered mad if he put it all so radically! But from such a radical characterisation of things we can learn what we really must learn to-day for the healthy progress of civilisation. Mankind will have to know again that intelligent thinking, which is the highest attainment of modern times, could not have come into existence if the life of ideas did not arise from a centre of destruction. And this centre must be reckoned with, so that it may be kept safely within and not pass over into our outer instincts and thence turn into a social impulse.

One can really penetrate deeply into the connections of modern life by looking at things in this way. Thus the realm that manifests as a centre of destruction lies within, beyond the memory-mirror. But the life of modern man takes its course between the memory-mirror and the outer sense-perceptions. Just as little as man, when he looks into his inner being, is able to see beyond the memory-mirror, so far is he from being able to pierce through all that is spread out before him as sense-perceptions; he cannot see beyond it. He adds to it a material, atomistic world, which is indeed a fantastic world, because he cannot penetrate through the sense-images.

But man is no stranger to this world beyond the outer sense-images. Every night between falling asleep and awakening he enters this world. When you sleep, you dwell within this world. What you experience there beyond the sense-images is not the atomistic world conjectured by the visionaries of natural science. What lies beyond the sphere of the senses was in fact experienced by the ancient Oriental sage in his Mysteries. It can be experienced only when one has devotion for the world, when one has the desire and the urge to surrender oneself entirely to the world. Love must permeate the act of cognition if one desires to penetrate beyond the sense-perceptions. And it was this love that prevailed especially in the ancient oriental civilisation.

Why must one have this devotion? Because if one sought to pierce beyond the sense-perceptions with one's ordinary human Ego, one might be harmed. The Ego, as experienced in ordinary life, must be given up, if one wants to penetrate beyond the sense-perceptions. How does this Ego originate? It is brought into existence by man's capacity to plunge into the chaos of destruction. This Ego must be tempered and hardened in that realm which lies within man as a centre of destruction. And with this Ego one cannot live on the far side of the outer sense-world.

Let us picture to ourselves the centre of destruction in man's inner being. It extends over the whole human organism. If it were to spread out over the whole world, what would then live in the world through man? Evil. Evil is nothing else but the chaos thrust outside, the chaos which is necessary in man's inner being. And in this necessary chaos, this necessary centre of evil in man, the human Ego must be forged. This human Egohood cannot live beyond the sphere of the human senses in the outer world. That is why the Ego-consciousness disappears in sleep, and when it figures in dreams it is often as though estranged or weakened.

The Ego which is forged in the centre of evil cannot pass beyond the realm of the sense-perceptions. Hence to the ancient oriental sage it was clear that one can go further only by means of devotion and love, by a surrender of the Ego; and that on penetrating fully into this further region one is no longer in a world of Vana, of weaving in the habitual, but rather in the world of Nirvana, where this habitual existence is dissolved.

This interpretation of Nirvana, of the sublimest surrender of the Ego, as it occurs in sleep and as it existed in fully conscious knowledge for the pupils of the ancient oriental civilisation — it is this Nirvana that would be pointed out to you by such an ancient sage as I placed hypothetically before you. And he would say: “With you, since you had to develop Egohood, everything is founded on fear. With us, who had to suppress Egohood, everything was founded on love. With you, there speaks the Ego that desires to assert itself. With us, Nirvana spoke, while the Ego flowed out into the world in love.”

One can formulate these matters in concepts and they are then preserved in a certain sense, but for humanity at large they live in feelings and moods, permeating human existence. And through such feelings they bring about a living difference to-day between the East and the West. In the West, men have a blood, a lymph, that is saturated by an Egohood tempered in the inner centre of evil. In the East men have a blood, a lymph, in which lives an echo of the longing for Nirvana.

Both in the East and in the West these things escape the crude intellectual concepts of our time. Intellectual understanding draws the blood from the living organism, turns it into a preparation, places it under a microscope, looks at it and then forms ideas about it. The ideas thus arrived at are infinitely crude even from the point of view of ordinary experience. That is all one can say about it. Do you think that this method touches the subtly graded differences of the people who sit here next to one another? The microscope, of course, gives only crude ideas about the blood, the lymph. Subtle shades of difference are to be found even among people who have come from the same milieu. But these shades

of difference naturally exist much more emphatically between the men of the East and those of the West, although only a crude idea of them can be had by modern thinking.

All this comes to expression in the bodies of the men from Asia, Europe and America, and in their relation to one another in outer social life. With the crude understanding that has been applied in the last few centuries to the investigation of external nature we shall not be able to tackle the demands of modern social life; above all we shall not be able to reach an adjustment between East and West. But this adjustment must be found.

In the late autumn of this year (1921) people will be going to the Washington Conference, and discussions will take place there about matters which were summed up by General Smuts, the Minister of Africa, with his instinctive genius. The evolution of modern humanity, he said, is characterised by the fact that the seed-ground for cultural activities, which has hitherto been in the regions bordering the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, is now moving to the Pacific. The culture of the countries situated round the North Sea has gradually spread throughout the West and will become a world culture. The centre of gravity of this world culture will be transferred from the North Sea to the Pacific.

Mankind stands face to face with this change. But men still talk in such a way that their speech savours of the old crude ideas and nothing essential is reached — although it must be reached if we are really to go ahead. The signs of the times stand with menacing significance before us and their message is: Until now only a limited trust has been needed between men, who in fact were all secretly afraid of one another. Their fear was masked under all sorts of other feelings. But now we need an attitude of soul that will be able to embrace a world civilisation. We need a confidence which will be able to bring into balance the relationship between East and West. Here a significant and necessary perspective opens out. The assumption to-day is that economic problems can be handled quite on their own account — the future position of Japan in the Pacific, or how all the trading peoples on earth may have free access to the Chinese market, and so on. But these problems will not be settled at any conference until men become aware that all economic activities and relations presuppose the trust of one man in another. In future this trust will be attained only in a spiritual way. Outer civilisation will be in need of spiritual deepening.