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Political Evil, Vladimir Putin and the Movement of Language

Charito J. Pizarro

Department of Philosophy, and

School of Education

University of San Carlos

cjpizarro@usc.edu.ph

Abstract

This paper ventures into the hermeneutics of evil as a political accoutrement and language as the instrument to truth. It investigates the definition of evil from a concordance of views of Aristotle, Parmenides and Ricoeur. It is argued that language moves towards the *aletheia* that began with Parmenides, was caught by Heidegger and Gadamer. The notion of *aletheia* as a historic unveiling or disclosure of truth is presented as a consequence of the unfolding of the self-reflexivity of language. The support for this claim leans on observations, such as Gadamer's, that even 'everyday' language belongs to the entirety of language and that it should not thus be bypassed or overlooked by the philosopher. The concept of neoteny proposed by Virno places man still at the stage of infancy with respect to an awareness of the significance of being as the presupposition of language. Language is to be seen all the while blooming its way to truth along unobtrusive sides in the idioms of religion, of poetry, e.g. of John Milton, and presumed 'fiction,' e.g. of James Joyce and Norman Mailer.

Keywords: *politics, evil, aletheia, language*

Man, the 'Political Animal'

It is noteworthy that Aristotle's statement, "Man is a political animal," has congealed the association of 'politics' and 'animal.' There are reasons for considering this unfortunate.

First, the juxtaposition of 'animal' and 'political' causes confusion through the entanglement of the meanings of 'political' and 'animal,' leading to the thought that someone 'political' is an 'animal.' What is elided is the fact that the English word 'animal' is derived from two sources. The first source is the Latin *animal* which refers to a 'living being, creature,' a meaning derived directly from the word *anima*, 'spirit, air, breath.' The second source is the meaning of the Latin *animal* as 'brute, monster, quadruped.' To the first meaning belongs *anima* as the "animating principle," Latin translated from the Greek *psyche*, English, "soul." From this tweak in Greek and Latin translation, a semantic intertwining has resulted, not unusual in the happenings of historical linguistics, on account of the fact that the two sources of the English word 'animal' are conflated in 1) the first meaning of *anima*, i.e. the "animating principle"; 2) the Greek *psyche*; and 3) the other meaning of the Latin *animal*, i.e. 'brute, monster, quadruped.' *Anima* as 'soul' comes out in the translation of *De anima* ('On the Soul'), Aristotle's treatise on the soul as the incorporeal essence of a living being in many philosophical, religious, and mythological traditions.

Second, because an animal, as an English noun, has the synonym, 'beast,' the associative faculty is fast to clip on the picture of a 'non-human,' that is, the Latin term 'animal' translated to 'brute, monster, quadruped.' Since we normally think of politics *de rigueur* as a human activity, then it is easy from there to think of politics as an activity engaged in by beastly humans. Thereby, Aristotle's 'man is a political animal,' is a popular quotation, without whoever is quoting it knowing its source in the fundamental position of the political philosophy of

Aristotle who, in *Politics*, was the first to call man a ‘political animal.’ Of a similar, even equal, popularity is the saying, ‘we’re just humans,’ used as a justification of acknowledged malfeasance.

Aristotle used the Greek word, *zoon*, and that is what has been translated to ‘animal’ as the word is used at present. In fact, Zoology is the ‘study of animals’ and rightly so, because *zoon* is recognizable in ‘zoo’ and –logy is the prefix derived from the Greek word *logos* referring to, in here, ‘study.’ When the second meaning of “animal,” that is ‘brute, monster’ is emphasized, Aristotle’s statement gives the picture, now traditional, of politics as a ‘career’ based upon violence, threats of violence and brutal territorial aggression.

However, it was rather the rational and the cooperative nature of man that was meant by Aristotle in his famous quote. He tells us in his *Politics* that only with the *polis* can man find fulfillment in life and lead a good life. Man and politics are linked together inextricably. We observe this claim of Aristotle as a fact in modern day politics, where evidence is adequate on how politics and government shape people’s lives. Without laws and governing bodies, man would be lost. Humans need structure and guidelines. Aristotle believed that human beings were intended, by their nature, to live with other human beings in society, saying, “*a man outside the city is either a beast or a god.*”¹ The full statement of Aristotle is, ‘Man is by nature a political animal,’ and with this he meant that humans are unique in joining together to form deliberative and governing bodies that seek to lead people in the *polis* to a better life. To Aristotle, the proper form of human existence was in an ordered community life, lived under rationally derived laws. He envisioned a mutual relationship between humans and their communities, the latter providing the conditions necessary for human flourishing. He argued that whatever action is made by someone is translated automatically to

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 27-29, in Papadis, 24.

a political form, where everything depends on *ethos*. Aristotle's ethics is thus a study of choice in action. Certain virtues such as courage and generosity are described as "practical" virtues, because they relate to the social nature of man. The reputed sociality of man also continues the "theory" of qualities that are related to man as a rational being.

Third, the historical reception of the word 'animal' referring to a human being seems to suggest that Aristotle set the ball rolling for a theory that came millennia after him; namely, the evolution theory of Charles Darwin claiming that we are the products of an animal evolution. Darwin's theory of 'natural selection,' when interpreted as 'the struggle of the fittest,' apparently warrants the idea that being "political animals" means survival of the fiercest in the political realm, using force, intimidation and violence to get their way.

Setting straight the 'political animal' language, we find that Aristotle merely noted that animals living in herds participate likewise in some 'common activity' and were therefore 'social' in that sense. Aristotle defines political animals as those who live together for some common function. Specifically, he writes, those that have a kind of activity in common are, for example, man, bee, wasp and crane.

As for humans, they are destined because of their very nature to live in the company of their fellowmen:²

ΦΥΣΕΙ ΜΕΝ ΟΥΝ Η ΟΡΜΗ ΕΝ ΠΑΣΙΝ ΕΠΙ ΤΗΝ ΤΟΙΑΥΤΗΝ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑΝ (sc. ΤΗΝ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΝ)

However, when the terms 'political' and 'social' are used at the same time in the Aristotelian treatises, the reference is clearly exclusive to the human being. The word 'political' in the sense of 'social' is used in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* primarily to mean that man

² Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a, 29-30, in Papadis, 21.

would prefer not to live alone even if he had at his disposal all the wealth in the world.³

‘Socializing’ is here more than engaging in an activity common to everybody else; it is the behavior of man as a social-political being, i.e. his conduct in his institutions and his purely political life in the political society of the polis. Aristotle is saying that humans are inherently designed for communal living and that the highest form of communal living is the orderly polis. Aristotle’s declaration that “barbarians are a community of slaves” is sometimes cited as an example of incipient racism, even if nothing about ‘race’ is seen in the work of Aristotle. He was rather late for the debate on the conflation of “not Greek” and “not civilized” in the early fourth century. In his idealization of the Greek city state as a community, the beehive of the human bee, the epithet ‘barbarian’ was used by him according to his notion that barbarians live a sub-political life, in families or tribes ruled by arbitrary authority of patriarchs or chieftains — as opposed to an orderly community of laws where it is possible for human beings to fulfill their proper destinies, their *telos*.

Man is more than the ‘animal’ in the second cited meaning of ‘monster, brute, quadruped.’ He can move beyond simple social behavior because “only man has superior intelligence and the ability to communicate in articulated speech, language, not mere sounds.”⁴ Man is in the scheme of nature as a being who thinks and is rational. The role of language in human society is crucial, for humans are naturally parts of an information-sharing network. Surprisingly, this jibes with the name we have given to this information-sharing network in the twenty-first century term, ‘Internet.’

Aristotle has a very humanistic vision of our place in nature. We

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1169b, 17-19, in Papadis, 22.

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a, 31-32, in Papadis, 23.

are built to form communities, to communicate and to cooperate. Because communication and cooperation are the basic facts of our nature, it is the city, the *polis*, that is the proper framework for human life. It is the ‘proper place’ to fulfill our destiny by creating a stable medium for discussion and common undertakings. Thus, the phrase ‘political animal’ πολιτικὸν ζῷον occurs three times in the *Politics*: 1) to refer to the political society of the *polis*; 2) to compare the natural political behavior of man to that of the bee and generally to that of all animals that live in herds; here it is argued that man is a ‘political animal’ to a higher degree than the animals that live in herds; 3) to claim that the socialization of man is fulfilled within the community of the *polis*.⁵

Now, although the Greek *polis* referred simply to the Greek city state and broadly to the community structure of ancient Greece, Aristotle’s use of the word *polis* allows the inclusion of any political society where the nature of man reaches its completion in and through it. To us today, it would be the world at large; that is, the *polis* is where the natural political behavior of man is attached to the natural character of the *polis*. So we ask what the sense of ‘natural’ here is, since the word is used to refer to both the political behavior of man and the character of the *polis*. In conjunction with the political behavior of man, what is ‘natural’ is man’s rational nature, his reason operating according to nature, for Aristotle deemed all nature, or nature in its entirety, to be good and purposeful. Applied to the person, he/she is good who is ontologically good in two ways: he/she is good and desires to do good and only the good.⁶ Regarding the ‘natural character of the *polis*,’ it is the nature of the *polis* to function as a nurturing environment, ‘the most complex and perfect political society,’⁷ where the rational nature of man can be fully essence, because “it is inside the *polis* that the *logos* of man is realized.”⁸ *Logos* here now refers to ‘ontological perfection.’

⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278b, 17-21, in Papadis, 23.

⁶ Papadis, *Abstract* (2006), 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*, 76, in Papadis, 24.

Impediments to the Realization of the ‘Logos’ of Man

According to Aristotle, the man of nature, being a product of nature, becomes ‘true man’ in stages through political life, specifically through the life of the *polis*.⁹ Heidegger, Kullmann and others are mistaken, claims Papadis, when they do not accept that Aristotle makes a distinction between animal and man, nature and *logos*, nature and civilization.¹⁰ To the meaning of ‘society’ belong both the notion of ‘civic society’ and the notion of ‘political society.’ For Aristotle, social-political behavior constitutes the very ontological characteristic of man. Man is a being, and beings, as all nature, have a purpose; they are themselves their own purpose and this not in vain. The self-realization of every being equals the self-realization of its respective nature.¹¹ According to Aristotle, the nature/*physis* of a being is identified with its *telos*, its end, which these beings reach only when the course of their ontological growth has been completed; that is, when they reach that level of perfection which is foreseen by their nature. The will always directs itself toward a certain end, and since the *telos* (end) and the good are one and the same in Aristotle, the will is always directed towards a good, but the object of the will must be identical with the true good, which is the object of the virtuous man’s will.

Ontological evil is an imperfection of a particular being, because this being has not attained completely the shape that it is destined to have by nature, or it has a defective form. Depending on their ontological perfection, ontological goodness would differ from man to man. In his *Politics*, Aristotle’s claim that man is a “political animal” is meant that man lives in a *polis*, a society governed by laws and customs so that with the power of speech and moral reasoning, man would

⁹ Papadis, 24.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1214a, 14, *Politics* 1332a, 38-40, *Nichomachean Ethics* B, 1-7, in Papadis, 24 and *Endnote* 18, 31.

¹¹ Papadis, 25.

develop his potential and realize his natural end in a social context. This is the “good life” of ontological goodness, which eventually could, and ought to, lead to ontological perfection.¹² This is not an easy life, but it is a life reflected in the highest good (*eudaimonia*), often translated as happiness, for man in the *polis*.

However, here again an ‘entanglement’ in language use occurs because of the resemblance of *daimōn* and *demon*. To disentangle this, the meaning of *daimōn* can be viewed according to a reference to the *daimōn* of Socrates because this Greek philosopher spoke of his *daimōn* as a spirit that inspired him to seek and speak the truth. Thus, it is often rendered as ‘the Genius of Socrates,’ in which case the usage pertains to a vital energy (c.f. - *élan vital*) or spirit (*spiritus*) or ‘nature of Socrates.’ The term originally meant a “supernatural being” or “spirit” that influenced a person’s character. An *agathos daimōn* (“good spirit”), for example, was benevolent in its relationship to humans. The word *demon*, however, is derived from the Greek word *daimōn* which is a morpheme in *eudaimonia*. The entanglement in the term ‘political evil’ is thus exacerbated by the entanglement in *daimōn* and *demon* in *eudaimonia*, which is the ‘highest good’ to be achieved in the *polis*. From its common association with an evil or malevolent spirit, the term *demon* was gradually applied to the lesser spirits of the supernatural realm who exerted pressures on humans to perform actions that were not conducive to their well-being and the well-being of others. The dominant interpretation became weighted in favor of malevolence and that which forebodes evil, misfortune, and mischief. From here it is not far-fetched to link, and equate, evil to the opposite of that which is beneficial to *eudaimonia* strived at by man in and through the *polis*.

¹²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1114b16-17, in Papadis, 26.

Vladimir Putin, the Aristotelian Evil

According to the definitions of Aristotle, therefore, Putin deserves the epithet ‘evil,’ which much of the world, and the democratic or ostensibly democratic nations, pins on him. Indeed, by the descriptions of the ‘requirements’ appertaining to the *telos* of the *polis* apropos the *telos* of man, Putin is the paradigm of ‘non-compliance,’ the belligerent autocrat violating all the rules of world security order, in his brutality corrupting the very concept of ontological goodness as the goal of the *polis* for man. He thus fits the picture of a ‘barbarian’ encompassing Aristotle’s definition of a barbarian. He is opposed to the laws-obeying world community purposed to make it possible, according to Aristotle, for human beings to fulfill their proper destinies, which is to attain ‘ontological perfection.’

The application of the term ‘inhuman’ to him would be that he is not a man of the *polis*. When Donald Trump therefore called Putin a ‘genius’ for invading Ukraine, Trump must surely have gotten snared in the entanglement of *daimon* and ‘demon’ in its English preferred, ‘thwarted’ translation.

However, if there is anything that is made clear by Putin’s barbarism, it is that he has confirmed Paul Ricoeur’s observation that Evil in philosophy and theology is defined by its dialogical structure;¹³ that is, evil committed by someone finds its other half in the evil suffered by someone. To do evil is always, either directly or indirectly, to make someone else suffer.¹⁴ Ricoeur asks, “Why is there so much suffering, far beyond ordinary mortals’ capacity for suffering?” He defines the problematic as follows: “How can we affirm at the same time, without any contradiction, three propositions: God is all powerful;

¹³ Ricoeur, “Evil, A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” 640.

¹⁴ Ibid, 637.

God is absolutely good; yet evil exists?"¹⁵ As an answer, Ricoeur retrieves the idea of the negation of the substantiality of evil: Evil is not substance.¹⁶ To be rejected is not only the answer *malum esse* ('evil is') to the question, *quid malum?* ('what is evil?') but this question itself. Actually, the only question we should ask, says Ricoeur, is *Unde malum faciamus?* ('whence comes the fact that we do evil?').¹⁷

According to Ricoeur, "this shifts the problem of evil into the sphere of action, of willing, of free will."¹⁸ Parmenides has a perspective to the problem. His basic axiom is that there is the One, a single, eternal reality ('Being'). Seen from Aristotle's notion of the *polis* functioning as a habitat enabling the human being to arrive at the human *telos*, a human being not having fulfilled the *telos* of a being in the *polis* has not achieved the end or purpose of being. In Parmenidean language, such human beings "turn away" from the One. That is, they turn away from the goal towards the 'fullness' of the One, which is Being. As being (*tò eón*), the One is full. The fullness of Being set in a conceptual metaphor compares Being to a sphere by Parmenides: "It is everywhere finished, like the mass of a well-rounded sphere, completely equidistant from the centre, since it is not possible that it should be a bit stronger or a bit weaker, here or there."¹⁹ Being, in the logics of identity and of non-contradiction, is simply "that 'is,' and it is not possible 'not to be.'"²⁰ Substance, by being, "is." Evil is not substance, is not being, in that it "is

¹⁵ Ibid, 639.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 269. The Greek and Latin fathers' idea that evil is not substance concurs with Ricoeur's and Parmenides' notion of 'not being.' Both Ricoeur and Parmenides arrive at the equation of 'no substance' with 'nothingness.' Colloquial language of today has carried on and developed synonyms of 'substance,' e.g. 'reality, corporeality, actuality, concreteness' so that 'something' has become opposite to 'nothing'; thus, "This has something; that has nothing." In addition, the opposition of 'concreteness' and 'vagueness' to capability of becoming known can be attributed to Parmenides' idea of Being's intelligibility and the un-knowability of 'not being.'

¹⁷ Ricoeur, "Evil, A Challenge...", 640.

¹⁸ loc. cit.

¹⁹ Parmenides, *Fragment* 8.42-9.

²¹ Nestor-Luis Cordero, "By being, it is: the thesis of Parmenides."

not.” The implication of this is that to say that if anyone, such as Putin, is called ‘evil,’ it means that what had formerly ‘no being’ managed ‘to be’ in Putin. That philosophical clue informs theological clues, from the Bible of Christianity and the holy books of world religions, concerning what is the common formulation for it, ‘by a demon or by demons possessed.’ The challenge to philosophy and theology is to bring about the wisdom from the ethical and political struggle against evil that may bring together all people of good will.²¹ Ricoeur cites this possibility through and in terms stemming from metaphysics, Platonic or Cartesian, to cite only two examples, such as first cause, nothingness, finality, infinite, finite, etc.²²

Parmenides’ notion of nothingness as turning away from the good matches the definition of good by Aristotle, and turning toward evil, as he describes it. In the suffering inflicted by Putin on Ukrainians, reenacting the genocide of the Jews by Hitler’s Nazis, Putin reenacts the suffering of the Russians at the hands of Hitler by what he irrationally calls ‘de-nazification’ of Ukraine. Thereby he ‘vindicates’ Russia’s goal to ‘decimate’ and ‘eradicate’ the ‘Nazi Ukraine.’

Reasonable beings in the more rational world see the irrationality of the Gordian knot of historical entanglements and grasp the suffering of the Ukrainians. They are able to empathize because of a natural functioning which manifests the nature of man fostered by the nature of the *polis*, according to Aristotle. Putin and his cohorts thus exemplify the Aristotelian evil, the malfunctioning of both the nature of man and the nature of the *polis*. The word ‘inhuman’ with its synonyms of ‘heartless, merciless’ corroborates the notion of humanity as empathy that realizes the reality of ‘the dialogical structure of evil’; that is, evil committed by someone finds its other half in the evil suffered by someone. The idea that evil committed by someone is suffered by

²¹ Ricoeur, “Evil, A Challenge...,” 648.

²² Ibid, 641.

someone leads to the idea that it is we who do evil (*malum faciamus*).²³ The problem of evil is in the sphere of human action, of willing, of free will. Beings, e.g. Putin, could will to “turn toward what has less being, toward nothingness”²⁴ or in Parmenidean language, away from the One, full of being. Ontological good is the affirmation of man’s being. Aristotle draws in the links connecting ontological good, reason and the soul. As far as man is concerned, the ontological good par excellence is identical to his rational soul,²⁵ which is the presupposition and instrument for all dimensions of moral good. Man has a unique ontological identity since he is the only rational being, that is, a being who possesses reason with the meaning of high intelligence. To the rational nature of man corresponds a unique analogous function engaging rational faculties resulting in rational activities.²⁶ Thus when Aristotle speaks of function with regard to man, he does not refer to a particular function such as that of an artist or a mathematician. Rather, it is the function of the rational abilities and powers “which he alone possesses,”²⁷ resulting in his rational activities. Civility is distinctly an activity of the rational being; it constitutes “the specific distinction of humankind, in spite of a ‘commonality’ with some animals, for it belongs to his rational mind.”²⁸ No other living being has the distinct function of abilities and powers “to think in terms of means and aims and to conduct theoretical research or in other words to contemplate and search for the truth.”²⁹ The will is always directed toward a good in the sense of purpose. This sense of purpose is thwarted in Putin, who is not in such ‘search for the truth.’ Like Trump trumpeting his supporters to the marching tune of “The Big Lie” ala Hitler (Trump had *Mein Kampf* on

²³ Ricoeur, *The Conflict*, 269.

²⁴ Ricoeur, “Evil, A Challenge...,” 639.

²⁵ Papadis, 26.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁸ *loc. cit.*

²⁹ *Ibid*, 27.

his bedside table),³⁰ Putin has sought to ‘de-Nazify’ Ukraine, which is led by the Jew Ukrainian president! Truth is certainly not constituted of alternative realities produced by the deliberate manipulation of facts of perception and historical veracity. In the world dependent on a proper and just global economy, what has to arise amidst the ruins of barbarism is a *polis* in Aristotle’s sense of a community operating according to laws visualized to attain the *telos* of the nature of man according to the *telos* of nature itself.

The Movement of Language

The Aristotelian claim that man is a superior being because of a rational nature is echoed centuries after him thereafter. Reason as the difference between animal and man is specifically accentuated in the Medieval period, from the 9th century to about the 12th and 13th century when arboreal imagery became a favored organizational schemata illustrating hierarchy and coherence in the growth of knowledge through the relationship of Logic, Reason, Knowledge and Language. Language was then acknowledged as the system that would embody logic that would lead to truth. “Logic is said to lead from one truth to another, and language is shaped to state these truths.”³¹ That is, it is in the hierarchy and coherence of the structure of logic in language on which the shaping of truths stands. Among all the trees of medieval philosophy which connected reasoning, language and knowledge, it was The Tree of Porphyry that aimed at building a scheme for logic. The ‘Tree of Porphyry’ eventually acquired the subtitle: *The Tree of Logic*. The earliest known Trees of Porphyry survive in Boethius’s translation of the *Isagoge* (Fig. 1.1) along with his commentary. In it, Boethius adopted

³⁰ Benjamin Kentish, “Donald Trump ‘kept book of Adolf Hitler’s speeches in his bedside cabinet,’” *The Independent*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-adolf-hitler-books-bedside-cabinet-ex-wife-ivana-trump-vanity-fair-1990a7639041.html#comments-area>.

³¹ Ashworth, “Language and Logic,” 77-78, in Verboon, 96.

Porphyry's view that Aristotelian logic functioned as a step toward the metaphysical appreciation of the universe. This was what Platonists considered to be the most essential form of philosophy.³² The Tree of Porphyry dealt with *praedicabilia* as the description and definition of the essential relationship between the predicate and its subject; a predicate is that part of a sentence that serves to describe or characterize a subject. The *differentia specifica* made a distinction in which the application of the predicate, 'being reasonable,' to the subject 'human beings,' served to distinguish man from, e.g. cows and plants. The term *Substantia* in the Tree of Porphyry³³ defined the specific predication of the human being in relation to the broad category of substance.

The schematic rendering of the Tree of Porphyry or Tree of Logic thus placed the focus on the specific difference (*differentia specifica*) of human beings, namely, reason (Fig. 1.2). The definition of person by Boethius as *rationalis naturae individual substantia* ('an individual substance of a rational nature') connects the concept of 'person' to the two meanings which the word *substantia* acquired as its usage developed historically into the concepts, substance and essence.

Although this definition of 'person' is not operative in contemporary discussion, "It may be the best one. A philosophy of person grounded on that definition is going to be more accurate and more compelling than others. It will direct attention back to key ideas such as nature, reason and substance."³⁴ Boethius' definition of person, integrated into the inter-relationship of the concepts of substance and essence, has paved the way for the construction of a tree of logic for use in other domains. Among these I am including a linguistic domain, specifically in a parse tree of syntax in transformational-generative grammar, because of the system of positioning and naming *substantia* in the tree of logic which concurs with the logic of phrase structure. I am

³² Suto, "From Analysis of Words to Metaphysical Appreciation of the World," 321-3.

³³ Verboon, 99.

³⁴ Simpson, "The Definition of Person," 220.

calling it ‘The Tree of Being’ (fig. 1.3.). Whereas in Boethius’ adoption of the Tree of Porphyry, Socrates, Plato and Cicero are named as the persons of *substantia*,³⁵ in the Tree of Being (Fig. 1.3) a person substantiated in the ‘lexical filling’ of *Substantia* (S) at the terminal string can be any person according to the definition of Boethius, i.e. ‘an individual substance of a rational nature.’

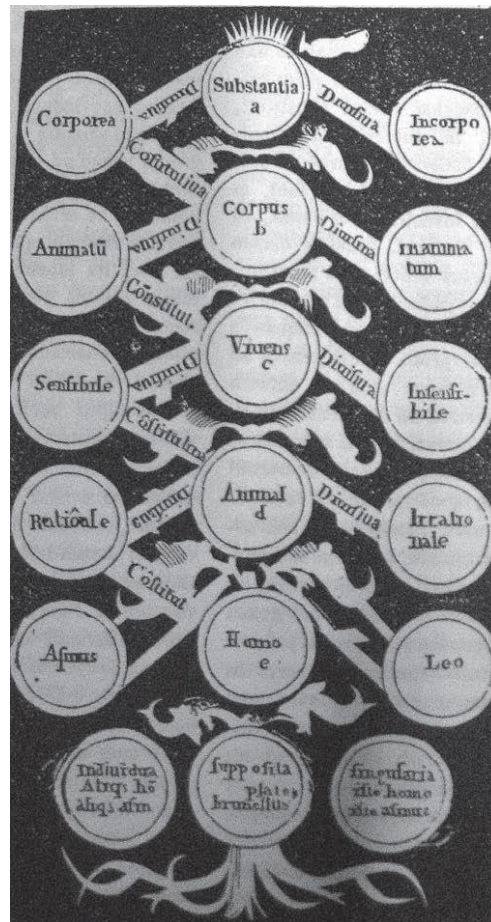


Figure 1.1. Boethius’s Tree of Porphyry according to Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia latina*, 221 vols, (Paris: Garnier-Migne, 1844–55; repr. Turnhout: Brepols 1985–97), (1847; repr. 1997), cols_41–42.

³⁵ Verboon, “The Medieval Tree of Porphyry: An Organic Structure of Logic”, 99.

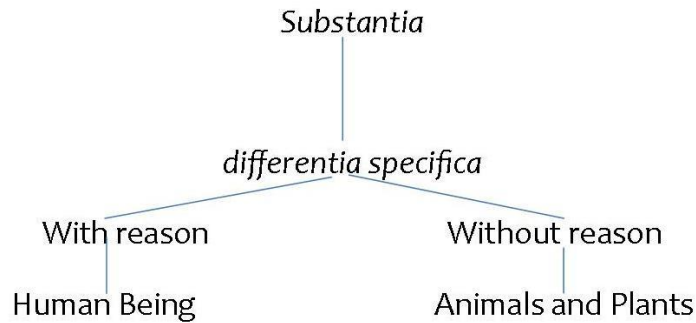


Figure 1.2. The Tree of Porphyry/The Tree of Logic at the *divisio* of *rationale/irrationale*

In the Tree of Being which I propose here (fig. 1.3), the schema is for every individual human being, *substantia in potentia*. In terms of the parse tree, every person has the potential, individually, to reach the ground level of being at what I refer to as the act of speech, the *atto di parola*, namely, at the ‘terminal string.’

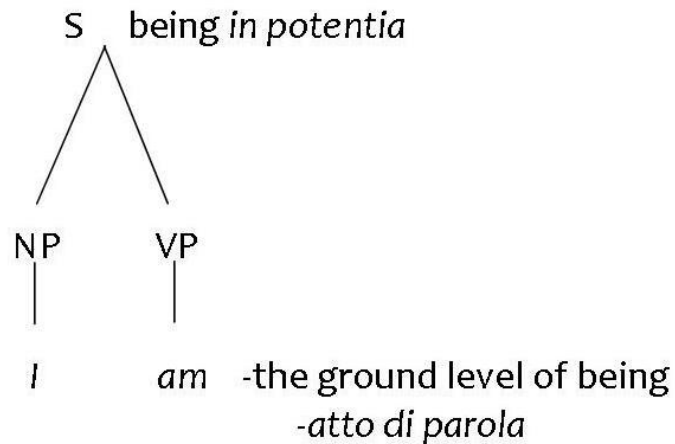


Figure 1.3. The Tree of Being

Regarding *substantia* and potentiality, Aristotle had already claimed in his *Physics* that a being receives definition only when it has reached its realization rather than when it exists only *in potentia*. This recalls also his view of man in the *polis*, where man becomes true man only at the fulfillment of his telos according to the fulfillment of the telos of the *polis*. The function of language for speakers in the said act of

speech is magnified in a statement of Agamben: “Precisely because being gives itself in language, but language remains unsaid in what it says and manifests, being destines itself for speakers in an epochal history.”³⁶ When in the person’s saying or in persons’ saying of the ‘I am’ in ‘epochal history’ (Fig. 1.3), language achieves its *raison d’être*, that is, to be said by a speaker or by speakers, the destination of being would have been met. The individual, the person (Boethius’ definition), reaches the ground level of being, i.e. at the *atto di parola* (fig. 1.3). The actualization of this as a historical event is the empirical arrival of the infant, the protégé of language, fulfilling the essence of being, by breaking through the human being’s neoteny, a term which Virno uses to describe ‘the permanence of infantile characteristics in adults.’³⁷

Neoteny, Virno asserts, is what accounts for humans ‘never learning.’ It is, what we may add, the cause of the horrendous errors of humankind caught by the phrase, ‘history repeats itself.’ The overcoming of neoteny is helped by the faculty of language itself for self-reference and its strategic property of recursion. The Tree of Being (fig. 1.3) is, to borrow now the words of Bukofzer,³⁸ the “continuous expansion” of a “formal principle that lent itself to infinite variation as to formal patterns.” To elaborate, the formal pattern is the syntactical structure of ‘I am,’ the *Satz* in the terminal string. It is, indeed, borrowing phrases from Katz and HaCohen, the “simple grammar with monothematic elaborations...of the kind explicated by Descartes,”³⁹ entailing a rational (thinking) being substantiating the essence of being. If the world, the universe, of man is viewed as what it truly is, i.e. a *polis* in its expansive meaning of a ‘place’ where, with his reasoning powers and language, man is enabled to arrive at humankind’s *telos*, then the nature of political behavior would have reached the sole aim of the

³⁶ Agamben, “Experimentum Vocis,” 10.

³⁷ Virno, in Lewis, “Virno’s Philosophical Anthropology,” *Journal of Italian Philosophy* 1, 138.

³⁸ Bukofzer (1948: 359), “Chapter 3 Music’s Begotten Illusion,” in *Tuning the Mind*, Katz and Cohen, 128.

³⁹ Katz and HaCohen, 129.

polis: eudaimonia. Language has been moving to this: the fulfillment of its *raison d'être* as enabler. This fulfillment requires looking at the twists and turns of language use. Disorder stems from the semantic turn in the bifurcating turn in translation of the Greek *anarchos* to the English 'anarchy,' i.e. without order, lawlessness. The cause of disorder ('chaos' in the Tree of Logic) is revealed as 'the missing beginning.' This is to be discovered in the *Clavis physicae* by Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080 – c. 1140), in whose Tree (in Verboon, 15) *anarchos* and *sine principio* mean the same thing, that is, 'without beginning':

Prima itaque divisionis nature differentia nobis visa est in eam que creat et non creatur, que species de solo Deo recte predicatur, qui solus omnia creat et ipse a nullo creatur. Ipse anarchos, id est sine principio, ipse principalis causa omnium que sunt, ipse principium, quia ex se sunt omnia, ipse medium, quia per ipsum subsistent omnia, ipse nis, quia ad ipsum tendunt omnia.'(Honorius Augustodunensis, *Clavis physicae*, in Verboon, 109; bolding mine)⁴⁰

We can trace colloquial expressions, everyday language, languages and dialects, disciplinary terminology - all involving words - to the beginning, the *arche*, the beginning of the thinking-being. Without the knowledge of this beginning, there is no language-in-common in the *polis* but only the Babel of entanglements.

In this connection, Hans Georg Gadamer can be cited in claiming that 'real,' 'everyday' or 'ordinary,' language, has philosophical significance: *Im wirklichen Sprechen oder im Gespräch, sonst nirgends, hat Philosophie ihren wahren, ihren nur ihr eigenen Prüfstein* ('In actual speaking or in conversation, nowhere else, has philosophy her real own, only for her, touchstone').⁴¹ Indeed, language is such that from the most

⁴⁰ Honorius Augustodunensis, *Clavis physicae*, ed. by Paolo Lucenti in Verboon, The Tree of Porphyry. The Organic Structure of Logic, 109.

⁴¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Begriffsgeschichte als Philosophie," tr. Pizarro, 91.

ancient philosophies to ‘everyday language,’ humankind should be able to arrive at their *telos*. Unfortunately, the use of language according to this *telos* has so far been foiled. Language itself is ‘misused’ in blatant violation of Aristotle’s notion of *ethos*. To borrow now the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe, politicians “...warp and bend language and ethics to a degree that shall astonish the world at their ingenuity.”⁴² It seems the aforesaid ‘ingenuity’ is now amply demonstrated, e.g. in the distortion of the facts of history and the denial of perception, despite the fact that perception in its very nature is built to help in the human navigation in and out of the infinite field of potential resources of knowledge. The *telos*-unfriendly disastrous propagandas of Hitler, Trump and now Putin attest to the human preference for misuse and disuse of language. It is to the credit of language that the word ‘trump’ in Urdu has opposite denotations, depending on what part of speech it is being used. As a transitive verb in this Indian language, it has the meaning, ‘to trick or deceive,’ but as a noun it has meanings which include, ‘a good fellow’ and ‘excellent person.’ This is an example of a certain truth, i.e. that language is at the disposal of humankind, for good or for evil, its use for the latter sharpened in the other meaning of a ‘political animal’ as a brute.

Nevertheless, language will not waver from its *raison d’etre* of helping humankind to its *telos*. For, true to its flexible utility, language is also what is used by the world religions and literature. The concordance between ‘evil’ in the terrestrial *polis* and ‘evil’ in the language for the believed supra-terrestrial is found in the articulations of religions. Significant is that in Zoroastrianism, ‘Evil Mind,’ ‘the Lie,’ and ‘Pride’ were subservient spirits used by the Evil Spirit (*Angra Mainyu*, later *Ahriman*) to deceive terrestrial humans so that they would choose a destiny that was subterrestrial. Since violence was considered evil, among other demonic figures was *Aēshma* (violence, fury, or the

⁴² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 256.

aggressive impulse). The chief activity of these evil spirits was to tempt humans to act in such a way that they would not achieve their supraterritorial destiny. In the language of various religions, demons contend for control of human lives, the most prominent being *Iblis* (the Devil), or *Shayṭan*, or Satan, who tempts humans.⁴³ The Aristotelian vision of the *polis* as the social-political environment to achieve the *telos* in the terrestrial realm is therefore reiterated in the belief in *telos* in a supraterritorial sense. Likewise, in the world's literary *oeuvre*, language stakes its claim to enlighten humankind.

The reference to the devil as 'usurper' is used by James Joyce,⁴⁴ when he supplies a subterranean meaning to the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in an allusion to the belief in malevolent angels fallen from a position of proximity to God—such as Lucifer in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—because of pride or for attempts to usurp the position of the Supreme Being.⁴⁵ John Milton⁴⁶ takes an avenging fallen angel, "slanderer" or "accuser" according to a translation of the Jewish concept of Satan, Lucifer, the fallen Light Bearer, plotting with cohorts to destroy the creation. As the originally Canaanite Beelzebub, the Lord of Flies or, perhaps, Beelzebul, the Lord of Dung, this 'slanderer' demon surfaces as the leader of evil.

The arch enemy of the Christ and his Father surfaces again with Norman Mailer⁴⁷ where this time we, in the Covid-19 pandemic, get an unexpected 'explanation' of deadly viruses after reading John Milton's epic poem. These viruses, according to Mailer's novel, are the 'tiny' (microscopic or 'invisible') allies of Satan out to destroy man, the envied, 'favored creation' of God, and thus assault 'what would most

⁴³ Awn, "Mythic Biography," 18.

⁴⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

⁴⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/devil>.

⁴⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

⁴⁷ Norman Mailer, *The Gospel According to the Son*.

hurt' the Creator. 'Evil already there'⁴⁸ in nothingness, without being, quick to assume, to be personified as, 'being' - is what is presumed in the demons of Chinese religions, the *guei-shen*,⁴⁹ which are presumed to be manifested in all aspects of nature. The western New Year's celebration with firecrackers is adopted from the Chinese ritual to ward off ritualistically the power of the demonic forces loose in the terrestrial or profane realm. Japanese religions are similar to Chinese religions in the multiplicity of demons with which humans must contend.⁵⁰

In 'epochal history,' the non-being, evil, takes over a being, thereby answering the questions about moral evil as suffering when Ricoeur asked, *quid malum?* ('What is evil?') and *Unde malum faciamus?* ('Whence comes the fact that we do evil?'), and affirming Ricoeur's answer, which is a shift from the false accusation of God to the 'sphere of [human] action, of willing, of free will.' Moral evil is not God's fault. Ricoeur says, "It is the work of freedom."⁵¹

So, to the nothingness described by Parmenides as opposite that of the sphere-like fullness of the One, *hen*, and the nothingness opposite to the fulfillment of *telos* in Aristotle's *polis*, I will add Ricoeur's definition of the same, "a nothingness hostile to God, not just a nothingness of deficiency and privation, but one of corruption and destruction."⁵² When non-being took the substance of being from humans, Jesus Christ exorcised them in legions which quickly entered

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, "Evil, A Challenge...", 640

⁴⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/guei>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.faena.com/aleph/ghosts-and-demons-of-japanese-folklore>.

⁵¹ Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 268. Although this, what he calls a "polemical and apologetic concept," is deemed insufficient by Ricoeur himself, the concession he affords it, i.e. that it accounts for "the clearest aspect of evil, what we may call actual evil" concords with the direction of definition I am following in this paper, namely Aristotle's notions of the 'ontological nature' of the human being and 'turning away from the *telos* of ontological perfection,' the latter agreeing with the ideas of Parmenides of 'non-being' and a 'turning away from Being.'

⁵² Ricoeur, "Evil, A Challenge...", 643

swine (synonym: brutes), and these subsequently drowned. Can Putin's devil/s be, likewise, exorcised?

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