

A Survey of Radical Evil, Disease, & Mortality

It is feasible to analyze the unprecedented evils facilitated through the behavior of each evil character by using Kant's definition as well as Augustine's and Aquinas's definition of evil as starting points. I consider the nature of Anton Chigurh, in particular, rather intriguing because his actions in *No Country For Old Men* seem to fundamentally challenge the very term that appropriately assesses them: "radical evil". Therefore, I think it is most fitting to examine his nature within Kant's definition of evil because it overtly transcends the seemingly clement disposition Chigurh is convinced he assumes whenever he defers to 'the coin toss'. Carla Jean, for example, sees through this façade and justly incriminates him as the ultimate decision maker when, after incorrectly calling the coin toss, she says, "You make it sound like it was the coin. But you're the one. The coin didn't have to say. It was just you" (Chp. 9, pg. 258). One might consider the use of the coin toss by Chigurh as a benevolent opportunity for the individual he is prepared to kill to exculpate him or herself from an unfortunate death. The fact is, the circumstances into which his victims are dragged become shrouded in evil intent – the will to kill – and, therefore, 'the coin toss' gains a diplomatic connotation that serves as a beacon of light within a pitch-black scene. Furthermore, this strategy is an attempt at prompting those who choose to participate in the game of coin toss to bestow upon him some degree of goodness, as strictly related to this circumstance, in their minds as well as rendering his presence extraneous because at the instant the coin is tossed it is only the victim and the two-faced coin that are at odds. This contains an acute level of ingenuity, in my opinion, because in a way it not only places him outside of the scope of the Augustinian and Aquinian definition of evil as *privation boni in subjecto*, but this tactical approach also disguises his true motives and inherent ethical doctrine.

Anton Chigurh's notorious presence in southwest Texas indeed affirms Kant's definition of "radical evil" because his entrance into the story is illustrated by the violent, horrendous murder of the sheriff's deputy in the first chapter of the book. During this gruesome scene, he is described as 'breathing quietly, holding him' and 'studying the dead man gaping up from the floor' (Chp. 1, pg. 6). This depiction of Chigurh in the opening scene quite effectively establishes the tone of the story and his nature as one that is detrimentally evil. The crime itself is so radical that any character at this point in the book ought to assert that *this* man is evil by nature. Some difficulty arises, though, when determining whether he observes maxims of good or bad origins because his actions are so entropic and tend to lack singular fidelity to ethical or unethical stability. However, later dialogue may provide the grounds to support that his *a posteriori* knowledge of the world often inclines him towards maxims that contextually align with the latter. The conversation that Chigurh has with Wells before he shoots him in the face reveals rather critical information regarding his beliefs and his perception of his own existence within the theoretical framework of life as human beings wish to conceive it. He shares that after killing a man in a parking lot and driving off, he let the sheriff's deputy take him into town in handcuffs because, as he explains, "I'm not sure why I did this but I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe that one can. That such a thing is possible. But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do" (Chp. 6, pg. 174–175). This statement does, in fact, mean that he feels an individual has the power to free themselves of a situation through their own will, but I think the key phrase here is: "a *vain* thing to do". How exactly is he regarding his surrender to the sheriff's deputy given that he had the

capacity to act as he had in the parking lot only an hour earlier? The word *vain* can be taken in a few different ways in this context, but I believe that he uses it to imply that his conceding to arrest was meaningless because his actions in the office affirmed that which he already believed was true. Thus, this permits the inference that he acts in accordance with his own will without paying much thought to the morality or immorality of his actions.

If Chigurh had been caught and asked to explain his reason for murdering the people that he did, then his response would definitely exonerate himself through explaining that the decision was not his to make and the act itself was not of his own will. On the contrary, he would either speak of his victims, such as Carla Jean for example, as either having bad luck or good luck, as seen in the case of the gas station proprietor who was spared by making the right call during the coin toss. So, it is accurate to conclude that Chigurh's capacity to commit foul murder properly situates him within Kantian theory because his actions specific to the events depicted in the book definitely make him an innately evil character operating under pretenses related to duty and obligation. His skewed and contorted reality permits him to align his intentions with the interworkings of fate in order to further justify his crimes. This is seen when Carla Jean tells him that he has no cause to harm her and he responds, "I know. But I gave my word. Yes. We're at the mercy of the dead here. In this case your husband," (Chp. 9, pg. 255) and a few pages later when she calls the toss incorrectly and he responds, "But look at it my way. I got here the same way the coin did" (Chp. 9, pg. 258). These statements attest to his will to subordinate himself to fate in the interest of only acting in accordance with necessary duty. Therefore, where Kant's definition of evil concerning the observance of evil maxims falls short, it appears clear to me that his use of fate as a scapegoat can be defined as either something completely outside of Kant's theory or characterized by a separate branch of it. I have found it appropriate to synthesize two ideological systems of thought that may better describe Chigurh's nature in the book: *egoistical fatalism* and *deontological determinism*. However, it is important to emphasize that he employs the latter as a disguise for the former in order to avoid any crises of conscience or moral conflicts. Thus, Anton Chigurh can be defined as a sociopath who treats his self-interest as his own foundation of morality while believing in a larger system of thought that causes him to regard events as predetermined, systematic, and consequently, inevitable.

Disease and mortality are regrettably necessary evils that must be a part of any existence that can properly be called human because if the human race no longer had to contend with these preordained components of life, then the natural limits of existence might cease to ensure the preservation of structure and order. The defilement of Nature may, in turn, create a fecund environment with apt conditions for the proliferation of unprecedented concerns that present more convoluted challenges for human life. The film *Blade Runner* actually offers a bit of insight on complications relating to this subject by telling a story with plots and subplots that seek to argue whether or not replicants ought be considered human because of their perceived inability to show proper emotional responses. According to Aquinas in "The Treatise on Human Nature", human beings have intellectual souls that are significantly more complex than the souls of plants or animals, which respectively have nutritive souls and sensitive souls. The problem that arises from the hierarchy that arranges these living organisms according to their developmental complexity is that, in the context of *Blade Runner*, replicants are not able to fit neatly within its structure. These biorobotic androids are designed to perfection in order to fulfill their intended roles over the course of four years, which infers that they may not need to exhibit the actions and behaviors vital to sustain human existence. If this is the case, then they lack a nutritive soul and are deprived of cultivating their sensitive soul, so they solely rely on the superiority of

their intellectual souls to gain precedence over the human race. These beings are lacking in areas of the soul that define a human, therefore, I reason that they in actuality are not perfect. The circumstances that arise within the film around revenge and the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between replicant and human are a direct result of man's desire to eliminate disease and manipulate the laws of mortality.

Human conceptualization of 'perfection' is terribly askew and the creation of artificial life forms, in the context of *Blade Runner*, seeks to set in place rules and guidelines that defy human imperfection. In *the Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis argues that pain and suffering is an act of grace from God, which he bestowed upon humans because it is mankind's inherent imperfectness that allows individuals to exercise free will. The absence of death and mortality violates natural freedom and, subsequently, relinquishes the opportunity for man to explore free will. Evil in these contexts are purported through the effects they have on human beings. If the human race had lives embroidered with unflinching perfect health and immortality, then free will is singlehandedly discarded and people are forced to live in compliance with the laws of an infinite immortality as opposed to the laws of a finite mortality. This means stripping human beings of their ability to positively or negatively influence the nature of their own being. The laws of the latter quite certainly means imminent death, but the freedom to travel the road leading to that point in any manner one pleases sets these two models a grave distance apart.

The drawback of eliminating all human diseases might cause the discombobulation of the life cycle in the natural world and the propagation of a host of unforeseen problems that threaten stability among the human race. At the onset of these new challenges, death might become the critical component of life for which people yearn the most because they had not anticipated the complications of completely eradicating disease. This is thoroughly exemplified in *I am Legend* when Lieutenant Colonel Robert Neville says, "God didn't do this, Anna. We did" in response to her remarks about the monstrous temperament of the "Darkseekers". It is this film that brings to light the practicality of disease as a necessary evil against humans beings because playing the role of God and altering His design, specifically the genome of the human race, may undoubtedly produce unexpected effects in response to irrational meddling on the part of humans. The thought of ridding the world of all human disease narcissistically places the human race at the center of the universe as the most important creatures created by God through taking the liberty to directly address the constant inquiries about Nature's offenses against man via human contrivances. This type of action shows blatant disregard for the general laws of nature that God put in place to inaugurate the development of the human race and even rejects the ability bestowed upon man to be made more "perfect through suffering" using the words of C.S. Lewis (*the Problem of Pain*, Chp. 6, pg. 105). In *the Problem of Pain*, at the conclusion of the Appendix, R. Havard, M.D. offers his take on the observed effects of pain from clinical experience and states that: "Pain provides an opportunity for heroism; the opportunity is seized with surprising frequency" (Appendix, pg. 157). Through thoughtful reflection and careful consideration of this statement, the power of pain and suffering has become much more significant in my mind. If pain and suffering are indeed catalysts that allow an individual to reach the pinnacle of their intellectual soul, then is it just to think that these elements of human life ought be embraced to a certain degree instead of outright denounced? After all, a change in the collective perception of physical evil may be the key to inflecting the nadir of intellectual souls.