
Deadly Nothingness: A Meditation on Evil

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"I see nobody on the road," said Alice.

"I only wish I had such eyes," the King remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too! Why, it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!"

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, chapter VII

An Augustinian Introduction

"Evil is the unbearable lightness of nonbeing," argues Jean Bethke Elshtain in her reflections on Augustine's understanding of evil.¹ It is an elegant formulation and captures Augustine's own sense of evil as "merely a name for the privation of good."² Both Augustine and Elshtain desire to knock evil off its seductive pedestal of greatness. For Augustine, evil is not some great force in the cosmos, which compelled God to create "the vast structure of this universe by the utter necessity of repelling the evil which fought against him."³ This was the "silly talk, or rather the delirious raving, of the Manicheans."⁴ Similarly Elshtain, invoking Han-

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¹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 81.

² Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), XI.23, 454.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

To regard
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deficiency a
dangerous
exaggeration.

nah Arendt's conception of the banality of evil,⁵ seeks to "deprive evil of its seductive powers."⁶ Following Arendt, Elshtain seeks to "destroy the legend of the greatness of evil, of the demonic force, to take away from people the admiration they have for great evil-doers like Richard III."⁷ To rectify the pernicious Manichaeism error of ontological evil—an evil coequal with a good God and no less powerful—evil has to be seen as a deficiency.⁸ It has to be seen not as something but nothing—no thing.⁹ However, this very solution to correct the error of Manichaeism, when it is extracted from the context of its formulation and asserted in its own right, demotes experiences of incarnate evil, and even, as Arendt once argued, radical evil.¹⁰ It was in fact Arendt's very attempt to abolish the admiration for a Richard III that had caused, in the words of Elshtain, her "tacit repudiation" of radical evil in "favor of the banality of evil" as embodied in the mid-level functionary Eichmann.¹¹ Yet, though "Eichmann was neither Iago nor MacBeth,"¹² examples of the latter type populate history and literature no less than the more contemporaneous incarnations of the former. If Eichmann was "sheer thoughtlessness,"¹³ then Cesare Borgia was sheer ferocity and power.¹⁴ And have not both types been present at all times? Is

⁵ Elshtain—in chapter 4 of *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, entitled, "Augustine's Evil, Arendt's Eichmann"—draws on Arendt's rightly famous reflections on Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem for crimes against humanity. The latter appear in Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964).

⁶ Elshtain, 74.

⁷ Arendt quoted by Elshtain, 74; originally cited in George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, and Evil* (London: Martin Robertson, 1984), 7), from an interview Arendt did with the *New York Review of Books*.

⁸ Augustine argues regarding the efficient cause of evil, "The truth is that one should not try to find an efficient cause for a wrong choice. It is not a matter of efficiency, but of deficiency; the evil will itself is not effective but defective" (*City of God*, XII.7, 479).

⁹ Cf. James Schall, "A Meditation on Evil," *The Aquinas Review*, no. 1, 2000, 25-41. Found at <http://www.morec.com/schall/docs/med.htm>. Schall notes, "Thus if we endeavor to mediate on 'nothing' or on no thing, we have first to imagine or experience some real thing."

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Book, 1973) argues, "If it is true that in the final stages of totalitarianism an absolute evil appears (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from comprehensively human motives), it is also true that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of evil" (ix).

¹¹ Elshtain, 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2nd ed, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Uni-

not evil at once the active deficiency arising from the will of fallen man and a shadow falling on man and penetrating his heart? Are not men made into monsters both by their own evil choices arising as a result of fallen wills inherited from Adam and by the corrupting influence of the devil? Is it for naught that men pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil"?¹⁵ Are men not in double jeopardy from one and the same evil, in "danger from the devil and from sin, if the Lord does not protect and deliver us"?¹⁶ Nothing is indeed a deadly something and to understand what this something is without succumbing on the one hand to Manichaeism and on the other to an overstatement of evil as no-thing, it is imperative rightly to divide evil. Drawing on Augustine and Tolkien no less than modern physics and mathematics, the following meditation seeks to do precisely this. In turn, armed with our insights into evil, the essay reflects on evil's peculiar modern incarnation as intimated by Tocqueville and then closes with a reminder that, whatever form evil may take, evil as nothing cannot triumph in the face of goodness that is something—indeed everything.

*Nothing
a deadly
something.*

The Dual Nature of Evil: An Introduction

Let us then consider in more detail Augustine, who, as in so many thorny theological matters, brought clarity and balance to the discussion. In a sermon on the Lord's Prayer, Augustine proclaims,

"Lead us not into temptation," will not be said, except where there can be temptation. We read in the book of holy Job, 'Is not the life of man upon earth a temptation?' What then do we pray for? Hear what. The Apostle James saith, 'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.' He spoke of those evil temptations, whereby men are deceived, and brought under the yoke of the devil. This is the kin of temptation he spoke of. . . . What then has he hereby taught us? To fight against our lusts. For ye are about to put away your sins in Holy Baptism; but lusts will still remain, wherewith ye must fight after that ye are regenerate. For a conflict with your own

versity of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. 29-30, 37, and 70.

¹⁵ Matt. 6:13 (this and all subsequent Scriptural references are from the New American Standard Bible, NASB). The passage could also read, ". . . deliver us from the evil one."

¹⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. xvi, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 329.

*“Conquer
thine own
self, and the
whole world is
conquered.”*

selves still remains. Let no enemy from without be feared: conquer thine own self, and the whole world is conquered. What can any tempter from without, whether the devil or the devil’s minister, do against thee?¹⁷

Leaving aside the vital consideration of regeneration and who can properly resist evil—a question of eternal significance but beyond our present meditation on the nature of evil—Augustine’s understanding of evil is that it is at once internal and external to man. Indeed, though the conquering of self is given primacy, the reality of external evil is not only assumed but asserted. The battle is fought in the heart of man, but the assault comes from without no less than from within. How can we best comprehend this simultaneity of nothing that is something? James Schall, in an essay entitled “A Meditation on Evil,” provides good counsel: “Strictly speaking, however, that about which we can ‘meditate’ is restricted to a something, to some good, to some reality, to something that is. . . . Any meditation on evil is an aspect of the meditation on nothingness.”¹⁸ Therefore, to illuminate in some way the nature of evil, we are well served to first reflect on the one thing that is truly something: the Good. Does the Good itself reflect an external-internal simultaneity that can help us understand the simultaneity inherent in the nothingness of evil?

The Dual Nature of Evil: What the Good can Teach Us

Arguably, few passages of Scripture better reflect the mystery of simultaneity than Paul’s words to the church at Philippi: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”¹⁹ At first glance a paradox seems to exist, for the burden to work diligently and in all humility inspired by the righteous fear of the Lord is placed squarely on the shoulders of man. Yet, in the same breath, Paul explains that we are but clay in the Lord’s hands.²⁰ What seems to be a paradox dissipates when we glimpse the right order of things and understand that, though wondrous and mys-

¹⁷ Augustine, Sermon VII, “Again on Matt. VI. On the Lord’s Prayer. To the Competentes,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, *Augustine: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospel*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 282-83.

¹⁸ James Schall, “A Meditation on Evil.”

¹⁹ Phil. 2:12-13.

²⁰ Cf. Rom. 9:19-21; see also Job 38-42, esp. 38:2-5.

terious, it does not defy explanation. As Augustine comments on Paul's words,

We therefore will, but God worketh in us to will also. We therefore work, but God worketh in us to work also for His good pleasure. This is profitable for us both to believe and to say,—this is pious, this is true, that our confession be lowly and submissive, and that all should be given to God.²¹

If God is the author and perfecter of the good faith, then our labors are done in Him and His work is accomplished in and through us.²² It is in light of this great mystery expounded in Philippians that Augustine writes,

Consider, now, whether the apostle did not thus long before foresee by the Holy Ghost that there would arise adversaries of the grace of God; and did not therefore declare that God works within us those two very things, even 'willing' and 'operating,' which this man so determined to be our own, as if they were in no wise assisted by the help of divine grace.²³

John Calvin, expounding on the same verse, elaborates on Augustine's teaching: "There are, in any action, two principal departments—the inclination, and the power to carry it into effect. Both of these he [Paul] ascribes wholly to God."²⁴ There is then a twofold external-internal simultaneity in the Good. First, it works at once transforming the heart of stone (internally) into a heart of flesh, which causes the heart to will to look outside itself (externally) to power from above to renew the mind.²⁵ Second, this internal-external simultaneity at once requires the labors of man (internal), and yet these labors are themselves the work of God (external). In all this man's agency is indeed required—that is his willing and working—but viewed from the vantage point of a more encompassing horizon, even willing and working are themselves gifts of God. Therefore, what at first seems paradoxical is

Man's willing the good is simultaneously internal and external.

²¹ Augustine, *A Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, *Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), chap. 33, 538.

²² See also Gal. 2:20 and Eph. 1:2 for the unity of the believer—as an individual but also collectively as Christians—with Christ.

²³ Augustine, *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, *Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), chap. 6, 219.

²⁴ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. xxi, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 65.

²⁵ Cf. Ezek. 11:19 and Rom. 12:1-2.

resolved in the clarity of the divine mystery, which will convince the humble who know that man sees only from the vantage point of a mirror dimly.

*The Dual Nature of Evil:
The External-Internal Simultaneity of Nothingness*

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The simultaneity inherent in the outworking of the Good is then established, but can the same be said of evil? Without falling into the mire of Manichaean dualism, one can, I think, safely assert with Paul that a certain parallel can be drawn with evil. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul states, "You are slaves of the one whom you obey."²⁶ To be a slave requires the existence of a master, and, though this master may not be eternal, he may well maintain a certain ontological reality. Paul elaborates: "Though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."²⁷ There can be no doubt about the master of our righteousness, but what about our slavery to sin? Is sin purely internal, a corrupted will inherited from Adam and employed by ourselves, which then causes us to fall only further from grace? Augustine is keen on asserting man's culpability as already seen in his discussion of the Lord's Prayer: "Let no enemy from without be feared: conquer thine own self, and the whole world is conquered. What can any tempter from without, whether the devil or the devil's minister, do against thee?"²⁸ Yet, note that Augustine does not deny a real devil, who "prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."²⁹ Augustine indeed has far less to say about the devil than the monk Martin Luther. Arguably this is understandable given Augustine's battles against those who would make a god of the devil, while Luther fears that the devil had become but a fairytale in the minds of men. Nevertheless, Augustine unmistakably argues that sin's parentage rests firmly with the Devil: "'The Devil sins from the beginning' . . . because sin first came into existence as a result

²⁶ Rom. 6:16.

²⁷ Job. 6:17-18; cf. John 8:34 and 2 Pet. 2:19.

²⁸ Augustine, Sermon VII, "Again on Matt. VI. On the Lord's Prayer. To the Competentes," 282-83.

²⁹ 1 Pet. 5:8.

of the Devil's pride."³⁰ Evil then also has a certain simultaneity, which at once is internal to man as he must wrestle with his own fallen will—a wrestling that truly begins only when man has been set free and becomes a slave to the law of liberty³¹—and external in the temptations of a very real Devil. The snake was not a fancy of psychological projection of the repressed Id but the Devil himself tempting man with the same hubris that was his own undoing: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil."³²

Now if all this be true, what then should be understood by Augustine's emphatic and unqualified claim that, "Evil has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level which is altogether without being"³³ And in the *City of God*, speaking of the fallen angels and referencing Ephesians 5:8, Plotinus' *Enneades* (3, 2, 5), and Epictetus' *Enchiridion* (4), Augustine states, "They are no longer 'light in the Lord; they have become in themselves darkness, deprived of participation in the eternal light. For evil is not a positive substance: the loss of good has been given the name of 'evil.'"³⁴ Again, what at first sight may seem contradictory and paradoxical is resolved if we keep in mind that a distinction exists between ontological evil in the Manichaean sense and evil which, though lacking true ontological existence, nevertheless retains a certain semblance of it. The former is sufficiently repudiated by Augustine.³⁵ In fact, the vehemence with which Augustine attacks any Manichaean sense of ontological evil—even to the point of exaggerating evil's non-being—must be understood not only in light of the great falsity of the Manichaean teaching, but also in light of the fact that Augustine had himself suffered under its weight. More than that, he was acutely aware of his own sin and was zealous to make confession unto God and was also very well aware

Augustine's emphasis on the nothingness of evil a reaction to opposite extreme of Manichaenism.

³⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XI.15, 447.

³¹ See Rom. 7 regarding the life of the believer; also see Rom 6:18: "And having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

³² Gen. 3:5.

³³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford University Press, 1991), III.viii(12), 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, XI.9, 440.

³⁵ See Augustine, *Writings in Connection with the Manichaean Controversy in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, *Augustine: The Writings Against the Manichaeans, and Against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).

Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. xxi, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2003), 65.

that he had taken lightly the scriptural admonishment to teachers not to lead others into error.³⁶ In time, Augustine's formulation of evil as a negation of the Good finds modern resonance in the articulation of the concept of the banality of evil previously mentioned. It is a thought that need not cause great perplexity if one accepts evil's inherent deficiency and remembers the goodness of the one God.

The Physics of Evil's Deadly Nothingness

More perplexing at first glance, however, may be the articulation of evil defined as a nothing that nevertheless is a deadly something—an ontological evil of sorts, albeit whose existence is parasitic off the good and which remains, at its deepest and darkest metaphysical explanation, a deprivation of the good.³⁷ It is perhaps ironic that modern physics—of all scientific fields most susceptible to materialist thinking, dealing as it does with matter that is inanimate—offers insight into such a dark matter. Indeed, “dark matter” is the very thing quantum- and astro-physicists are desperately seeking to find and explain. Without delving into scientific nuances, scientists estimate “that 90 to 99 percent of the total mass of the universe is missing matter.”³⁸ As scientist Chris Miller elaborates, “‘Missing matter’ may be misleading—it’s really the light that is missing. Scientists can tell that the dark matter is there, but they cannot see it.”³⁹ Miller’s words find an eerie reso-

³⁶ Cf. Augustine’s reflections on his own Manichaeism in the *Confessions*; see James 3:1 and his admonishment, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.”

³⁷ Schall argues in his “A Meditation on Evil”: “We are accustomed to hear it said that the devil is evil or that Hitler was evil. But as such, neither the devil nor Hitler is evil in what each is. Unless each remains good in his substantial being, in what he is, he can neither exist nor have any evil attached to him. Evil always exists in, is a parasite of, something good.”

³⁸ Chris Miller, “Cosmic Hide and Seek: The Search for the Missing Mass.” Found at <http://www.eclipse.net/~cmmiller/DM/>. Similarly, in an *Economist* piece entitled “Dark for Dark Business,” it is reported, “The stuff that is visible through telescopes (including those that see in frequencies other than visible light) amounts to only about 0.5% of the total amount of stuff out there. The rest is dark. That is not necessarily surprising. What is surprising is that almost all of the dark stuff is stuff that could never be visible. It is completely different from the matter that makes up atoms” (*The Economist*, 3 January 2002).

³⁹ Ibid. Furthermore, referencing Kim A. McDonald, “New Findings Deepen the Mystery of the Universe’s ‘Missing Mass,’” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (23 Nov. 1994): A8-A13, Miller goes on, “Bruce H. Margon, chairman of the astronomy

nance in Augustine's explication that God alone can "see" evil for God alone could see into the "darkness":

Between that light (which is the holy fellowship of the angels, shining with the intelligible illumination of truth) and the contrasted darkness (which stands for the depraved minds of the evil angels who have rejected the light of righteousness) God could make the division; for the evil, though in the future, could not be hidden from him.⁴⁰

This is not to say that the nothingness of physics is the nothingness of evil or the darkness of Genesis 1:4. It is to say that nature may possibly provide a measure of insight into the age old question of how something can at once be and not be.⁴¹ That is, we find an illuminating analogy in physics' conception of nothing as something, and something of which there is an abundance and which is perceived as integral to the created universe.

The Mathematics of Evil's Deadly Nothingness

A similar lesson can be gleaned from the realm of mathematics and the concept of zero. Robert Kaplan opens his intriguing considerations of the concept of zero with a paradox: "If you look at zero you see nothing; but look through it and you will see the world"—all of mathematics' "parts swing on the smallest of pivots, zero."⁴² It is ludicrous to suppose that zero as nothing is evil, but

department at the University of Washington, told the *New York Times*, 'It's a fairly embarrassing situation to admit that we can't find 90 percent of the universe' (John Noble Wilford, "Astronomy Crisis Deepens As the Hubble Telescope Finds No Missing Mass," *New York Times* [29 Nov. 1994]: C1-C13). This problem has scientists scrambling to try and find where and what this dark matter is. 'What it is, is any body's guess,' adds Dr. Margon. 'Mother Nature is having a double laugh. She's hidden most of the matter in the universe, and hidden it in a form that can't be seen' (McDonald)." Consider also Greg Landsberg's interesting observation with respect to nothingness as somethingness in an article entitled "Particle Physics Made Painless: When Nothing Means Something": Fermilabs observed a monojet—a single quark or gluon spotted in a particle detector, appearing to recoil against nothing (FermiNews, vol. 25, no. 11, 28 June 2002. Found at <http://www.fnal.gov/pub/ferminews/ferminews02-06-28/p5.html>). See also John Barrow, *The Book of Nothing: Vacuums, Voids, and the Latest Ideas About the Origins of the Universe* (New York: Pantheon, 2001).

⁴⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XI.19, 450.

⁴¹ Similarly, consider the related paradox of how one can know and yet not know. See, for instance, Plato's *Euthydemus*, especially 294a–297b where Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are trapped in their own sophistry.

⁴² Robert Kaplan, *Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 3. See also Charles Seife, *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea* (New

To argue for evil as simply no-thing invites the danger of relativism.

that is to miss the point of bringing nothing to the foreground for consideration. If zero is a something—and a pivotal something at that—which is itself nothing, can we not possibly see the nothingness of evil as still a deadly something? To argue for evil as simply no-thing invites the danger of relativism; for, as Kaplan reflects in his closing chapter, “anything asserted about what doesn’t exist is true.”⁴³ Evil is all the more deadly when it masquerades as the “angel of light.”⁴⁴ Yet to argue for the reality of evil does not necessarily imply that Manichaeism must be correct. Arendt’s Augustinianism need not repudiate radical evil in favor of the banality of evil in order to rob evil of its seduction.⁴⁵ Rather, it may prove more profitable to see that evil is a spectrum ranging from incarnate banality to the ever fading shadow of nothingness.

Hence, as Augustine reminds us, it is indeed futile to seek for the efficient cause of an inherently deficient action: “To try to discover the causes of such defection—deficient, not efficient causes—is like trying to see darkness or to hear silence.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, we do know that sin has its beginning in the Fall from Heaven⁴⁷ and that in Lucifer’s turning towards nothingness something evil entered the world. As Augustine notes, “Yet we are familiar with darkness and silence, and we can only be aware of them by means of eyes and ears, but this is not by perception but by absence of perception.”⁴⁸ “For of course,” Augustine continues, “when we know things not by perception but by its absence, we know them, in a sense, but not-knowing, so that they are not-known by being known.”⁴⁹ Even Augustine questions if this is an “intelligible statement.”⁵⁰ Yet, though perplexed and challenged by its intelligibility, we must still ask whether such statements accord with the nature of things. With Jean-Paul Sartre we may be forced to accept “that nothingness haunts being”⁵¹ and further, in a very Au-

York: Penguin Books, 2000).

⁴³ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁴ 2 Cor. 11:14.

⁴⁵ Elshtain, 73.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.7, 479-80.

⁴⁷ John 8:44.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.7, 480.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 16. Sartre explains what he means by this haunting in these words, “By this we must understand

gustinian sense, that “emptiness is emptiness of something. Being is empty of all other determination than identity with itself, but non-being is empty of being.”⁵² Again, physics provides an analogy in quantum theory. As Stephen Hawking notes in discussing the strange phenomena of black holes seemingly emitting particles even though “we know that nothing can escape from within its event horizon. . . . The particles do not come from within the black hole, but from the ‘empty’ space just outside the black hole’s event horizon! . . . What we think of as ‘empty’ space cannot be completely empty.”⁵³

The Deadly Something of Evil in Middle Earth

If we cannot dismiss nothing as simply nothing, for it is still something, how should we then think about evil? One possibility, returning to an earlier remark, would seem to be to consider evil along a spectrum, which can teach us much about evil as it ranges from its banal incarnations at one end to its shadowy origins at the other—shadows which recede in darkness. If physics and mathematics have offered some intimations of how nothing can be something, fantasy has offered some intimations of the spectral nature of evil. J. R. R. Tolkien’s myth of Middle Earth, recounted in his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, is in a very real sense a long meditation on good and evil. The tale’s central premise of seeking to destroy the one ring of power forged by the Dark Lord Sauron is itself not a quest in search of something but an “anti-quest, whose goal is not to find or regain something but to reject and destroy something.”⁵⁴ It is then in its very structure less a tale about something and more a tale about what should not have been and what should not be. The very ring itself reflects Tolkien’s ambiguity about evil’s simultaneity of being and non-being. The ring was forged. It is a creation of evil—that is, disorder—designed, paradoxically, to rule and assert order: “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them. In the Land of

not only that being has a logical precedence over nothingness but also that it is from being that nothingness derives concretely its efficiency” (16).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵³ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 105.

⁵⁴ Tom (T. A.) Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 114.

Mordor where the Shadows lie.”⁵⁵ Evil’s creations are, in their very essence, parasitic off good’s ordering power.⁵⁶ Yet it is described as a force in its own right: ruling, finding, bringing, and binding. No mention is made of the Dark Lord as the effective cause, and yet it is in the Dark Lord’s service, a lord who himself is a shadow. Further, the Ring’s power over its bearer is dependent on bending the bearer’s will to return the ring to its master. It does so with the lure of its beauty and power—the ring is “precious” to the bearer. In light of these aspects, Tom Shippey observes, “The ideas that on the one hand the Ring is a sort of psychic amplifier, magnifying the unconscious fears or selfishness of its owners, and on the other that it is a sentient creature with urges and powers of its own, are both present from the beginning.”⁵⁷ It is interesting to observe in passing that Shippey concludes that these aspects of the Ring correspond to “the internal/Boethian and external/Manichaeian theories of evil.”⁵⁸ It would be more accurate to subsume both under Augustine, who, as we have discussed, emphasizes the internal aspect of evil in the choice of man’s will but does not deny the existence of “‘The Enemy,’ as Tolkien commonly referred to evil.”⁵⁹ Tolkien, as a devout Catholic, indeed had not only Augustine in mind but the entire Christian tradition that understood evil as ontologically nothing on the one hand and yet tempting the heart of man on the other, and between these truths the unseen reality of fallen angels. The entire unfolding of the redemptive drama is the quest to restore the breach caused by the falling away of both angels and men. Without in any sense negating the incarnation as a positive irruption into time, the history of creation is an anti-history designed to restore the good order, which once was and always will be. History is then not the tale of progress from some primordial

⁵⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 59.

⁵⁶ C.S. Lewis in his incisive case for *Mere Christianity* is emphatic in observing that even those who engage in evil justify their actions in moral terms and they feel the need to do so because they have violated the Moral law (*Mere Christianity & The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001). Plato offers a similar consideration in Book II of the *Republic* when it is observed that even the unjust desire to appear just.

⁵⁷ Shippey, 136.

⁵⁸ Shippey, 136. See pp. 128-35 for a full account in which, ignoring Augustine, Shippey credits Boethius with the view that “there is no such thing as evil. What people identify as evil is the absence of good” (130).

⁵⁹ Birzer, 90.

beginning, nor is it the tale of regress from some utopia. Rather, it is the tale of the created order awaiting in grievous patience the return of God to dissipate the shadow and restore all things to their rightful place.

*History the
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Similarly, as a subcreation, the essence of Tolkien's quest is to reassert the good and common order by destroying the power of the shadow—in a very real sense the power of nothing. The unfolding of this anti-quest takes the Fellowship of the Ring (and eventually only the chosen one, Frodo) ever deeper into shadowy realms to the precipice of darkness itself. The banal life of the Hobbits in the Shire—reflective in so many ways of the *Kleinbürgertum* of bourgeois Europe—with its common evils and common goods is physically and metaphorically left behind. As Frodo and Sam wander deeper into the realm of the shadow, the deeper (and therefore truer) forces shaping the order and disorder of things are seen ever more clearly. Behind simple goods and banal evils, we discover greater good but also greater evil at work.

The Two Towers the Visible Spectrum of Evil

Central to understanding the shadow of evil threatening Middle Earth—and, if one would see the timelessness in this shadow, also the evil that threatens all men at all times—are the “two towers.” At one pole of the evil’s visible spectrum is the tower of Saruman, a good wizard (Istari) who renounces his vows and joins Sauron, the Dark Lord. He deludes himself into believing that he can be his own master, only to fall under Sauron’s spell. At the other pole is Sauron’s own tower. Together, the two towers and their two lords reflect the spectrum of visible evil from its incarnate form to its shadowy origins. Saruman is flesh and blood and his tower is given physical dimensions. He succumbs to the temptation besetting all men, viewing his knowledge with pride and in his pride mimicking evil. In due course Saruman is undone. As Gandalf and Elrond explain to the Council when Saruman’s betrayal becomes evident, “Saruman has long studied the arts of the Enemy himself. . . . It is perilous to study too deeply the arts of the Enemy, for good or for ill. But such falls and betrayals alas have happened before.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the recurrent fall of man to temptation is inherent in a fallen world, and evil, therefore, is a matter not to be trifled

⁶⁰ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, II/2, 270, 278.

Shadows
require
being
to exist.

with. It is for this reason that Tolkien berated C. S. Lewis for his *Screwtape Letters*,⁶¹ for having delved too deeply into the mind of “The Enemy.”⁶² It is for this reason that Tolkien does not give the Dark Lord embodiment and instead refers to his shadow. It is also why, as Shippey observes, “When Gandalf falls into the abyss, Aragorn says that he ‘fell into shadow’; Gandalf says that if they lose, ‘many lands will pass under the shadow’; sometimes ‘the Shadow’ becomes a personification of Sauron, as when Frodo tells Sam that ‘the Shadow can only mock, it cannot make . . . not real new things of its own.’”⁶³ Tolkien dared not describe evil in any more substantive terms than shadows, but by doing so evil becomes something that is and yet is not. Shadows require being to exist. As Shippey notes of Tolkien’s description of evil as shadows, they “both are and aren’t. Aren’t, in that a shadow is not a thing, but an absence caused by a thing. Are, in that they have shapes, and physical effects. . . . In Mordor, absence can take on a kind of life, can become presence.”⁶⁴ Sauron remains an all seeing eye and his tower shrouded in shadow. Yet, as Birzer argues, “By placing evil in the background . . . Tolkien has created an evil that is outright ominous, for it seems to be everywhere.”⁶⁵

Shadow Passing Into Deadly Oblivion

The bounding of visible evil between the two towers does not, however, exhaust the spectrum of evil. Rather, the towers serve as respective touchstones for the point beyond which evil, at one end, loses even its shadowy existence and becomes no-thing and at the other becomes evermore banal. In light of Tolkien’s righteous fear of “The Enemy,” Tolkien intimates but does not explore the utter end of the spectrum of evil beyond Sauron’s shadowy realm. At the precipice of the nothingness, Tolkien mentions the presence of Morgoth—“the mythological equivalent of Lucifer”⁶⁶—of which

⁶¹ See Bradley J. Birzer, *J.R.R. Tolkien’s Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-Earth* (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2003), 89-90.

⁶² In this regard, Socrates’ discussion on the education of young men in the *Republic* should not be forgotten, “He must learn to understand the measure of evil not by way of experience but by dint of knowledge” (409d).

⁶³ Shippey, 129.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶⁵ Birzer, 91.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

entity the shadow of Sauron “is nothing but a poor substitute.”⁶⁷ It would seem that the closer we come to true evil—Evil itself—the more it becomes wraithlike⁶⁸ and shadowy; the more it becomes nothing yet all the more a deadly something. Whereas incarnate evil seeks the death of the body (thinking at its most diabolical but least clairvoyant that it can thereby harm the soul), the shadow seeks the death of the soul and even sustains the body to accomplish the soul’s defeat. In this sense, the Ring has sustained the twisted life of Gollum (and even Bilbo), who, though possessing and possessed of the Ring for a shorter span of time, “showed no signs of age.”⁶⁹ Yet the withering—the wraithing—had begun inside. As Gandalf warns Frodo,

A mortal . . . who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he fades: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later—later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last—sooner or later the dark power will devour him.⁷⁰

Embodied Shadows

Sauron’s Ringwraiths are precisely such fading horrors that walk in “the twilight under the eye” for awhile before passing into utter darkness. They were at one time kings of men who had let themselves be corrupted by the Evil Lord. They stand as substantive shadows between the pure shadow Sauron (and the oblivion beyond) and the incarnation of evil in Saruman. Gandalf says of them: “Nine [rings] he [the Dark Lord] gave to Mortal Men, proud and great, and so ensnared them. Long ago they fell under the dominion of the One, and they became Ringwraiths, shadows under his great Shadow, his most terrible servants.”⁷¹ As Shippey observes, “The Ringwraiths are just like mist or smoke, both physi-

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶⁸ For a good treatment of the etymology of wraith and its construction by Tolkien, see Shippey, 123-24. Further elaboration of the term follows in this article, and it will suffice for the present to keep in mind that wraiths are at once alive and dead, material yet immaterial, but twisted throughout.

⁶⁹ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, I/2, 58.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

cal, even dangerous and choking, but at the same time effectively intangible.”⁷² Since they are less man and more demon, “The Ring-wraiths work for the most part not physically but psychologically, paralyzing the will, disarming all resistance.”⁷³

That these kings first became wraiths as a result of their pride should not be glossed over. Evil in a fallen world may well stalk its prey, but it can only seduce the proud who do not understand the need to serve God in fear and trembling. Indeed, insight can be gained into the Devil’s great fall if one considers that it was his pride that would not humble itself in the sight of his Lord and became vain in its futile speculations. Once the great angel had fallen, evil, as something that remains ontologically nothing, entered creation and men were faced with the choice of whom they would serve—the Good One or the Evil One.⁷⁴ It therefore follows that more often than not,

People make themselves into wraiths. They accept the gifts of Sauron, quite likely with the intention of using them for some purpose which they identify as to believe in some ‘cause’ which justifies everything they do. In the end the ‘cause’, or the habits they have acquired while working for the ‘cause’, destroys any moral sense and even any remaining humanity⁷⁵

Evil comes to be seen as a positive force by habituation.

In another tale of the power of corrupting evil, Ivan Karamazov’s Grand Inquisitor too wanted to help the people but ended up serving the Devil.⁷⁶ It is by habituation—addiction may be even more accurate⁷⁷—that evil comes to be seen as a positive force, which began, as one should never forget, as nothing.⁷⁸

⁷² Shippey, 124.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Thus Abel chose to serve God and offer appropriate sacrifice and Cain became futile in his own speculations and offered the sacrifice he desired. God rejected Cain’s sacrifice and accepted Abel’s. Cain slew Abel and in his choice became an exile even as the choice of his parents had led to their expulsion from the Garden. Adam and Eve fell away from the good. Cain continued on this path leading nowhere and “went out from the presence of the Lord” (Gen. 4:16; cf. Gen. 3-5). Is it not telling that Cain built the first city of man? He who is nothing is yet something.

⁷⁵ Shippey, 125.

⁷⁶ See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: The Modern Library, 1996).

⁷⁷ Cf. Shippey, 118-19.

⁷⁸ Indeed, habits of the heart seem historically more efficacious in corrupting man than in sanctifying him. See Robert N. Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Incarnate Evil: The Radical and the Banal

Whether incarnate evil becomes a radical evil or a banal evil depends on the potentiality of the man to mass will and power and stage a spectacle. Hence, Machiavelli's Duke Borgia personifies radical evil. He had "laid very good foundations for his power" and "judged it necessary" to satisfy and stupefy through the ferocity of a spectacle.⁷⁹ For this purpose, he employed a "cruel and ready man" (a banal man), Messer Remirro de Orco, to "whom he gave the fullest power."⁸⁰ A similar illustration can be found in Augustine's recounting of the exchange between a "captured pirate" and "Alexander the Great": "The king asked the fellow, 'What is your idea, in infesting the sea?' And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, 'The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I'm called a pirate: because you have a mighty navy, you're called an emperor.'⁸¹

In the world of Middle Earth, incarnate evil in the person of Saruman is, then, a reflection of a wraith, which itself is a reflection of the Dark Shadow, hence a twice-removed reflection of evil and so quite banal and yet, as an incarnation, quite radical. Saruman's radicalness—as Borgia's—stems from his great power, of which he sought only more. Yet in all his power, he had no immediate power over the soul. His was the banal power to kill the body, and, because he had great power, he was able to kill many. It would not be justified to infer from this that even the death of one man is ever anything but a great evil (never banal) but only that, whether the power wielded is banal or radical, incarnate evil's power is primarily over the body. As Christ reminds his "friends": "Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"⁸² Saruman's evil, though radical, is confined to the domination of the visible world. A clever man more than a good wizard, Saruman had "a mind of metal and wheels" and sought only knowledge, "organization in the service of knowledge," and "finally

⁷⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 29, 30.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. John O'Meara (New York: Penguin, 1984), IV.5, 139. Drawn from Cicero, *De Republica*, 3, 14, 24.

⁸² Luke 12:4-5.

control.”⁸³ He would enslave all and be master and would sooner destroy Middle Earth and reign as a god over nothing than not to be a god at all. In this hubris, he had succumbed to the wraithing process and like the evil sway of all demagogical tyrants in all ages (consider, in light of recent horrors, the mesmerizing speeches of Hitler), Saruman’s voice “was a delight to hear . . . all that it said seemed wise and reasonable, and desire awoke in them by swift agreement to seem wise themselves.”⁸⁴

Under the sway of Saruman’s voice were orcs, Tolkien’s most banal embodiment of evil, which were but the perverted “creations” of evil—actually corruptions, for evil as negation cannot create. They were once elves who were “ensnared by Melkor [Morgoth] . . . and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved.”⁸⁵ If one mulls over the formulation “arts of cruelty,” one is struck by the misappropriation of the term “art,” which is intrinsically designed for the glory of God, being used to corrupt his creation. Birzer cites a letter Tolkien wrote in 1950 in which Tolkien argues that *The Lord of the Rings* is “about three intimately related things: the ‘Fall, Mortality, and the Machine.’” Perversion and the Fall occur when

The sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the laws of the Creator—especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective,—and so the Machine (or Magic).⁸⁶

The disorder of evil exhibits order, and this makes it dangerous.

Sauron and Saruman reflect the reliance on *goeteia*—the magic not of enchantment (*magia*) but the “power derived from demonic source and intended to dominate others and deprive its victims of their free will.”⁸⁷ Sauron’s magical art relies on psychological and spiritual techniques, which work directly on the soul; Saruman can only imitate his lord’s magical arts and corrupts bodies more than minds as he creates his abominations—his orcish Urak-hai—with magic and machine. Of enchantment evil knows nothing.

Evil has turned the order of things upside down; it has inverted, as Birzer observes, “Aristotle’s metaphysical notions of love, order,

⁸³ Shippey, 169, 170, 126.

⁸⁴ Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), III/10, 183.

⁸⁵ Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 50.

⁸⁶ Tolkien quoted by Shippey, 103.

⁸⁷ Birzer, 102.

and the Prime Mover's motivations and actions."⁸⁸ But observe: the disorder of evil exhibits order, and this is what makes it dangerous. The Devil masquerades as the angel of light.⁸⁹ The temptations seem pleasing to the eye and the words sound right and good, but the path leads to destruction.⁹⁰ Nothing is indeed something, and, as Lewis's *Screwtape* understood, "nothing is very strong."⁹¹

Evil as a Teacher

What has the journey into the realm of fantasy taught us about nothing? Has it all been too fantastical? If the inclination is to consider the analogy at best with a detached bemusement and dismiss the excursion as devoid of reality, I ask the reader to survey the world in which we live. References to the evil of Hitler have already surfaced in this discussion, but has it been a stretch of the imagination? Is it a stretch to see in the smokestacks of Auschwitz Sauron's tower? Does not Saruman's fascination with mechanization and enslavement to the machine in his zeal to dominate man and nature reverberate with echoes of grinding mills, slaughterhouses, gas chambers, gulags, camps, and the calculating efficiency that desires only to ensure that trains run on time? Is Eichmann anything other than an orc—a deformed man enslaved to the disordered order of bureaucracy and but a henchman of his masters? And since those dark days, how much has been written about the shadow that loomed over Europe seeking whom it might devour? In light of recent horrors can we believe the shadow has passed? Tolkien did not intend his subcreation to be an allegory of *Zeitgeschichte*. Nevertheless, would it be stretching the mind too far to see that Tolkien's reflections on the nature of evil (and good) are timely precisely because they are timeless—that is, as long as time remains and we live in a fallen world filled with nothing that is a deadly something? And if technology and bureaucracy have made evil more businesslike, more refined, more, in a word, banal, is it not nevertheless evil? Indeed is the threat not all the greater as even banal evil today seeks to put the soul to sleep more often than it desires to destroy the body?

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁸⁹ 2 Cor. 11:14.

⁹⁰ See Gen. 3:1-7.

⁹¹ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 300.

A Warning: The Banal Evil of Tocqueville's Democratic Despotism

Another great thinker and writer, not of fantasy but history, foresaw the greatness of the threat of man's being fed what Aldous Huxley would call soma. Alexis de Tocqueville writes of those in democratic America who have "discovered another road, which seems to lead inevitably to servitude. They shape their souls beforehand to suit their necessary servitude, and despairing of remaining free, from the bottom of their hearts they already worship the master who is bound soon to appear."⁹² Tocqueville asks, "Have all ages been like ours? And have men always dwelt in a world in which nothing is connected? Where nothing any longer seems either forbidden or permitted, honest or dishonorable, true or false?"⁹³ It is the same dread that causes Tocqueville to warn at the end of his study of the milder, degrading despotism that democratic nations have to fear: "Little by little [it] robs each citizen of the proper use of his own faculties. Equality has prepared men for all this. . . . It does not break men's will, but softens, bends, and guides it . . . it hinders, restrains, enervates, stifles, and stultifies so much that in the end each nation is no more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd."⁹⁴ Finally, however gradual its development may be, individuals will lose the "faculty of thinking, feeling, and acting for themselves, so that they will slowly fall below the level of humanity."⁹⁵ Is this not the wraithing process itself?

Sagaciously Tocqueville illuminates without exaggeration "certain dark corners of the human heart."⁹⁶ He discerns that the loss of mediation (whether understood ultimately as between God and man or mundanely as between society and man) that so inheres in the striving after equality will produce a pernicious emptiness. Between man and "the huge apparition of society or the even larger form of the human race" there is nothing but empty space.⁹⁷ Tocqueville may not recognize, however, that the emptiness he laments has a source anterior to and deeper than democratic egalitarianism. "Thus says the Lord . . . 'They went far from Me, and walked after

⁹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Harper Collins, 1969), 701-02.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 692; cf. all of volume II, part 2, chapters 6 and 7, 690-702.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 694.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 488.

emptiness and became empty.”⁹⁸ Tocqueville understands that the empty space will not remain empty, for even the soul abhors a vacuum. The delirium and passion for equality, Tocqueville warns, after the “old social hierarchy, long menaced, finally collapses . . . seeps into every corner of the human heart, expands, and fills the whole.”⁹⁹ Yet even Tocqueville may not understand the depth of the spiritual danger:

When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.¹⁰⁰

The evil of emptiness fills itself.¹⁰¹ All the while, the individual, reveling in his egoism thinking himself a god, does not realize that he hears only his own soliloquy as “every man finds his beliefs within himself.”¹⁰² Tocqueville provides an incisive discussion of the flow of evil in modernity but fails to see that the pedigree of democracy’s evil is far more ancient than the advent of the age of democracy. Evil has always roared about.

A Hope: A Light that Overcomes Darkness

These things could drive man to despair. But it should be asked, would this not itself be a great good? Is it not in despairing of his own strength to defeat “The Enemy” that man grasps for a hope that is not vanity? Our striking of the Hydra’s head, only to see it replaced with two more equal in horror to the first need not be the final word if we have eyes to see that, in the fullness of time, the serpent’s head has been crushed and what may have seemed to be a “long defeat”¹⁰³ is in truth the stage for victory. History is not the ultimate horizon. What transpires in man’s earnest play wherein

Only at the end of time will temptation cease and evil no longer threaten.

⁹⁸ Jer. 1:5.

⁹⁹ Tocqueville, 505.

¹⁰⁰ Luke 11:24-26.

¹⁰¹ It is worthwhile remembering Augustine’s formulation of evil previously cited: “For evil is not a positive substance: the loss of good has been given the name of ‘evil’” (*City of God*, XI.9, 440; also XI.22, 453-54).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 506.

¹⁰³ It is Galadriel, an Elven queen, who explains to Frodo that a final victory cannot be achieved in creation: “Through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, II/2, 372).

the forces of good arrayed against the forces of evil clamor for supremacy against the ever-changing backdrops of time are but the shadows cast by puppets traversing a stage. The meaning of the play can only be found in the Word uttered before all time, in a script that calls the actors to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”¹⁰⁴ Only at the end of time when time itself ends will temptation cease and evil no longer threaten. Then the shadow will dissolve and dissipate as the Good covers all-in-all and leaves no room for the nothing that never was but a figment.

Even in the present age, we are well advised to remember that the battle against evil is a struggle “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”¹⁰⁵ “The monsters of fiction and nightmares are,” as Birzer reminds us, “merely manifestations of the true, original evil—the perversion and mocking of God’s creation.”¹⁰⁶ Original evil incarnate in the Evil One seeks embodied souls to twist into wraiths. And we prove ready allies in our own undoing in ever succumbing to the longing of our fallen hearts to be like God, knowing good and evil.¹⁰⁷ We imagine that we can wield all rings of power in righteousness to overcome evil, which is merely nothing and a nothing that is outside of us. We miss and dismiss the deadly wound in the heart and the deadly something roaring about. The heart pierced by a Morgul-knife can only serve the shadow, and, if it remains in the wound, as Gandalf explains to Frodo, “You would have become like they are, only weaker and under their command. You would have become a wraith under the Dark Lord.”¹⁰⁸ When the work of the evil within allies with the Evil without, men fade and in time monsters appear and wraiths are born.

In Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of *The Snow Queen* (*Die Schneekönigen*), demons create a mirror, which distorts the reflection of all that is good and beautiful and exaggerates the hideous. In their

¹⁰⁴ Matt. 6:10.

¹⁰⁵ Eph. 6:12.

¹⁰⁶ Birzer, 91.

¹⁰⁷ Evil ensnares us by our pride to want to know not only what it has been granted for man to know, but all things—to become as God knowing good and evil. The evil in Middle Earth arose because of the snare of knowledge. As Tolkien recounts, “And many eyes were turned to Elrond in fear and wonder as he told of the Elven-smiths of Ereinion and their friendship with Moria, and their eagerness for knowledge, by which Sauron ensnared them” (II/2, 255).

¹⁰⁸ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, II/2, 234.

hubris to carry the mirror up to heaven, it is shattered and the glass splinters fly throughout the world and settle in the eyes and hearts of man such that they see only evil and their hearts become ice-like clumps.¹⁰⁹ Do not the seeds of true Myth reside in such myths? Is it not because of man's deadly wound and the splinter of evil in the heart that God declares that the nations "will know that I am the Lord" when "I will give you a new heart and a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh"?¹¹⁰ And so men pray, "Thy Kingdom come," for it is only with His coming that the shadow shall vanish for all eternity, and it is only through the invisible power awakened in prayer that the deadly something of nothing can truly be overcome. Such piety, which seems but foolishness to the world, is, as Socrates reminds Phaedrus, the sort of "madness . . . given us by the gods to ensure our greatest good fortune. It will be a proof that convinces the wise if not the clever."¹¹¹

In his sermon on Matthew 11:25, Augustine urges his listeners to

Turn thy attention from all men. What enemies then remain? "Against principalities and powers of spiritual wickedness, the rulers of the world." It might seem as though he gave the devil and his angels more than they have. . . . The world is full of those who love it, and of unbelievers, over whom he is ruler. This the Apostle calls darkness. This darkness the devil and his angels are the rulers of. This is not the natural, and unchangeable darkness: this darkness changes, and becomes light; it believes, and by believing is enlightened. . . . For when ye were darkness, ye were not in the Lord: again, when ye are light, ye are light not in yourselves, but in the Lord. "For what hast thou which thou hast not received?" Inasmuch then as they are invisible enemies, by invisible means must they be subdued. A visible enemy indeed thou mayest overcome by blows; thy invisible enemy thou conquerest by belief. A man is a visible enemy; to strike a blow is visible also. The devil is an invisible enemy; to believe is invisible also. Against invisible enemies then there is an invisible fight.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Hans Christian Andersen, *Die Schneekönigen* [The Snow Queen] (Hamburg: Carlsen Verlag, 1996).

¹¹⁰ Ezek. 36:23, 26; see all vv. 22-37.

¹¹¹ *Phaedrus*, 245c.

¹¹² Augustine, Sermon XVII, "On the Words of the Gospel, Matt. XI.25 . . ." in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, *Augustine: Sermon on the Mount, Harmony of the Gospels, Homilies on the Gospel*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 311-12.

Socrates prays that the gods would grant that he “may be beautiful inside.”¹¹³ Augustine prays that God would heal us of our diseases and be merciful to our sins.¹¹⁴ Both realize the battle is within but the hope of salvation is without. May we too pray that his rod and staff comfort us as we too walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil, for it is in the end nothing and He everything.

¹¹³ *Phaedrus*, 279c.

¹¹⁴ Augustine, *On the Trinity, Books 8-15*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 223.