

Does TCI have too positive an image of human beings?

Hat die TZI ein zu positives Bild vom Menschen?

This article deals with a more precise definition of the »inhuman« mentioned in the second Axiom. To this end the author, a theologian and psychologist, examines the concept of evil and asks what it could mean. The issue is addressed as a fundamental philosophical and theological problem. Once both terms have been discussed and put in perspective, the author points out approaches to successfully leading groups in line with TCI values. He concludes that the power of trust and cooperation can be stronger than the effect of evil.

All living things and their growth [and decay] deserve reverence. Respect for growth requires evaluative decisions. What is humane is valuable; what is inhumane threatens value. (Cohn and Farau, 1984, p. 357) *

In this essay, I would like to reflect on the inhuman, "the evil": Are humans inherently evil if they are not prevented from acting evil by force (through education and laws)? This is certainly what the "facade theory" suggests, against which R. Bregman argues (see below).

Humanistic psychology has an essentially positive view of human beings: "With this attribution, humanistic interaction is linked in very different ways to the diverse insights and perspectives on human beings and the true and good life (> art of living) that have converged in this tradition [humanism] for centuries. I consider the freedom to make decisions (autonomy), the capacity for growth (optimism) and the necessity of responsibility (ethics) to be particularly important in this context." (Vogel, 2025, p. 260 f.)

Reflecting on the opposite side, i.e. "evil," also seems important to me. In humanistic psychology, we are not only concerned with commitment *to* something, such as human development and self-actualisation, but also with the most targeted and (hopefully) effective commitment *against* something, so that what is desirable can come to fruition. But what exactly are we fighting against? That is the question I would like to explore here, together with the question of whether the desired form of group leadership, which is as free of domination as possible, is not based on an illusion about us as human beings.

First, I will attempt to clarify the terms.

I consider it "evil" when someone pursues their own interests and desires without regard for the effects their actions have on other living beings, thereby destroying trust. (Only humans can be "evil" in this sense). This evil can be encountered in three degrees:

as a lack of empathy = not perceiving anything other than one's own interests, without malicious intent, so to speak; on the other hand

as *wanting to* harm others (for example, to take revenge for wrongs suffered, cf. the fatal consequences of traditional blood feuds); or, even more intensely

as feeling pleasure when others are caused pain (evil sadism, for example, in torture).

How can this happen?

Hanna Arendt rejects the mystification of evil: §1§ "In her 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she put forward the thesis that criminals such as Eichmann show that extreme evil is neither something profound or tragic, nor something remarkable or fascinating; nor is it something

radical and inherent in human beings as a Damocles-like tendency, as Kant had claimed and a long line of philosophers had repeated since. Rather, evil in its most extreme form is actually banal, arising fundamentally from thoughtlessness and forgetfulness, which lead people to do worse things than conscious will and deliberate action." (Schäfer, 2023, p.30 f.)

Fear also causes people to find themselves in situations where they are no longer able to perceive others and show consideration for them. There is the fear of missing out, which makes others appear to be nothing more than competitors for scarce resources. There is the fear (often fuelled by experience) of being restricted in one's own development by violence or other forms of power, which makes people ruthless, i.e. evil, in defending their own interests.

"Evil" is a theme in philosophy and religion that concerns humanity. Where does it come from? How does destructiveness enter our world and our relationships? Are there evil gods or angels? In Christianity, it has often been personified in Satan or the devil. This attributes an independent power to evil in the world. The question in Christianity is always: how could a God believed to be good and loving create evil (human suffering, enmity between people, even murder) or (as "almighty") merely allow it? The influential Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) defined evil as "nothingness" (1992), thereby attempting to absolve God of responsibility for evil. Other religions have dealt with evil in their own ways.

Konrad Lorenz caused a stir with his book *The So-Called Evil: A Natural History of Aggression* in 1963, because the title suggests that "evil" does not actually exist. But Lorenz does not actually write about "evil" in humans, but about the aggressive behaviour of animals towards their own kind and the productive power of aggression in evolution, which has led to inhibitory potentials that are necessary for the preservation of the species (survival of the fittest). Peace gestures (Lorenz, 1963, p. 185) have developed where animals are capable of fatally injuring members of their own species (e.g. wolves). There is a correlation between the effectiveness of an animal species' weapons and its inhibitions against using them against members of its own species (Lorenz, p. 182), although these mechanisms may be overridden when dealing with members of a foreign group of conspecifics. Humans have not "inherited" these pacification gestures and can therefore behave destructively towards each other. This gives humans the moral/ethical duty to strive for peaceful coexistence.

"In their search for the origin of evil, the ancient stories [of the Bible] first tell of the birth of freedom, the awakening of consciousness and thus the experience of time, through which the world becomes an object of concern. Secondly, they tell of the dramatic entanglements that arise from the fact that there are differences between people, that they become aware of these differences, that they want to distinguish themselves from one another and that they actively and aggressively fight out these differences." (Safranski, 1997, p. 123f) Evil is (probably not only) in the Bible associated with human freedom of choice and, in this respect, is a prerequisite for truly human life (cf. the story of the Fall in Genesis 3, where the seductive serpent promises: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil"). Humans can decide against being empathetic, against taking others seriously as equals, and can act evil in this sense. Indifference and thoughtlessness (see Hannah Arendt above) are often enough for evil to happen. But revenge and torture are terrible and deliberate escalations of disregard for other people's right to life. If evil is seen not as actions that are hostile to life and humanity, but as resistance to powerful authorities such as the gods, then the "drama of freedom" defends human freedom of choice (with the risk of perverting the " " possibility of choice into something destructive). Safranski traces this "drama of freedom" through Western philosophy and the history of theology associated with it. At the end of his investigation, he concludes that the First World War seems to have destroyed all hope of overcoming evil in human coexistence. Under the impression of

the war, Sigmund Freud developed his theory of the powerful "death drive". "When the civilising suppression of 'evil desires' ceases, it becomes apparent that 'human beings ... commit acts of cruelty, malice, treachery and brutality that would have been considered incompatible with their cultural level'" (Safranski, p. 247). "For Freud, the belief in the necessary success of human history is shattered. Man is a kind of aberration of evolution" (Safranski, p. 249). According to this view, evil is an inherent, uncontrollable, i.e. natural, possibility of behaviour that is only superficially covered by civilisation and can only be curbed by force. The "drama of freedom" would have come to a bad end. Can the second axiom of TCI help us here? The term "inhuman" in the second axiom of TCI does not mean "animalistic," but rather "not appropriate for humans." §2§ It is not animals that are inhuman, but humans who do not live up to their position in nature, i.e., their responsibility. Ruth Cohn identified the appeal to the "right of the stronger", which according to Darwin ("On the Origin of Species") determines and drives evolution as the "survival of the fittest", as the essential "inhuman" factor. "I am preoccupied by the fact that ethical values of humanity, such as reverence for nature and love for one's neighbour, have had so little practical effect despite thousands of years of philosophical and religious teachings that they have been repeatedly supplanted by physical, military and economic violence, by the 'law of the strongest'.... Ethics, justice and charity (are) only possible for humans, [thus originating] from areas that plants and animals do not experience as consciousness." (Cohn and Farau, 1984, p. 443 f.) What distinguishes us from animals is our ability, through our minds, to act socially, to show consideration for one another and to resolve conflicts without violence. "The essence of human beings as human beings is their spirituality, through which they bear responsibility." (Cohn and Farau, p. 444) "We humans have been released from the paradise of unconsciousness of good and evil through our ability to make decisions." (Cohn and Farau, p. 446).

Rutger Bregman offers a new perspective on our topic in his book *Im Grunde gut* (2021), presents "A New History of Humanity" and, in his obviously extensively researched study, proves that humans have evolved through evolution as a friendly, cooperative species and have thus survived, and that this basic constitution, which can still be experienced today in private encounters (and also in TCI courses), has only been suppressed by "civilisation" (cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1778) with the advent of agriculture and the resulting claims to property and power, and thus the introduction of competition and fear of one another, which has led to destructive consequences in our coexistence. "Contact leads to more trust, more solidarity and more mutual helpfulness." (Bregman, 2021, p. 392) In our culture, the "facade theory", which states that civilisation is only a veneer/facade over the true nature of human beings, who are actually permanently wild animals, has largely prevailed. "That humans are selfish by nature is a doctrine that has been taught in the West for centuries." (Bregman, p. 35) Unfortunately, this "facade theory" has largely determined the history of philosophy and theology (see the quote from Sigmund Freud above), as well as pedagogy and criminal law. According to Bregman's research, evil behaviour in humans is not a natural given that can only be controlled by force.

Bregman goes on to ask: How, then, does "evil" arise, for example in the form of war? "According to Morris Janowitz, the evil [of World War II] did not result from the sadism of degenerate villains, but from the solidarity of brave fighters. The Second World War was a battle fought by millions of ordinary people, driven by the best of human nature – friendship, loyalty, fidelity – to bring about the greatest slaughter in history." (Bregman, p. 233) The same certainly applies to the background of organised crime: loyalty to one's own group and brutal threats of violence against "deviants". Bregman problematises empathy, which on the one hand creates solidarity, but on the other hand must be seen as fundamental to enmity. "We put our loved ones in a favourable light and become blind to the perspective of our opponents who are outside our

field of vision. This is the mechanism [...] that has turned us into the nicest and most cruel species on the planet. This is an uncomfortable truth: empathy and xenophobia are two sides of the same coin." (Bregman, p. 244) Humans have a natural aversion to violence, especially direct physical violence against others. This can obviously be trained away, or at least reduced, through strong influence (brainwashing). (Bregman, p. 248) The leadership, which does not have to participate in direct combat, has a different personality profile than the ordinary soldiers: "War criminals such as Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels were clear examples of power-hungry and paranoid narcissists." (Bregman, p. 249)

Bregman rejects Machiavelli's extremely negative view of human nature and says that "power corrupts" by making people's natural willingness to cooperate and help each other appear dysfunctional for the maintenance of power. He quotes Machiavelli: "It can be said in secret about all men that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly in danger, and greedy for gain. ... Men never do good unless they are compelled to do so." (Bregman, p. 250) Studies on Machiavellianism conducted by Prof. Dacher Keltner in summer camps did not confirm these theories: "Anyone who behaves in a summer camp as *Il Principe* prescribes is looked at askance" ... and excluded. Keltner recognises a "survival of the friendliest" (Bregman, p. 251). According to Keltner's research, powerful people change towards an antisocial personality disorder: "They are more impulsive, selfish, reckless, arrogant, narcissistic and coarse than average ... they are more shameless ... and do not blush." (Bregman, p. 253). Feelings of power disrupt the process of "mirroring," which plays an important role in empathy. Powerful people are therefore less connected to others. §3§ "We can summarise the history of civilisation as a history in which those in power constantly invent new reasons for their privileges" (Bregman, p. 259). "One almost gets the impression," writes Israeli historian Harari, "that a complex society needs hierarchies and discrimination." (Bregman, p. 265) "For thousands of years, shame was the most powerful means of taming the powerful." (Bregman, p. 266) But "in a democracy, shamelessness can be a great help" [because it allows people to act unscrupulously without fear of sanctions] (Bregman, p. 267)

After conducting intensive research into what has gone wrong in human history over the past 10,000 years or so, leading to discord and oppression, Bregman asks himself: "Is there another way? Can we use reason ... to design new institutions? ... What if schools and companies, ministries and governments started from the good in people?" (Bregman, p. 277) Bob Rosenthal discovers the magical power of expectation, the so-called "Pygmalion effect". It is about how one's own expectations of others can have a significant positive (e.g. increased performance or self-confidence) or negative (insecurity, self-criticism, "negative spiral") effect. (Bregman, p. 283ff). Bregman describes several examples of alternative institutions where trust in people has been used with great success (Bregman, 317 ff). "Looking back at the most hopeful upheavals of recent decades, it is clear that trust and contact have always played a key role." (Bregman, p. 395) He substantiates this with, among other things, his description of the difficult process in South Africa that led to the end of the apartheid regime. He shows that and how Nelson Mandela was able to successfully instil trust even in his opponents, despite all his terrible experiences. Against what and towards what must our efforts against the power of the "inhuman" be directed in our TCI work?

From what has been said here, I conclude that the question of evil actions in ourselves and others is about the fact that 'interdependence' is not perceived sufficiently and comprehensively, but that people only refer to themselves. §4§ "Evil" arises between people who see themselves in an "us and them" situation, where empathy is then only available for the narrower "us". "Addressing the 'us' and 'them' problem is largely the concern of my group work." (Cohn, 1975, p. 225) This is linked to the topic of power and those in power and the fears they trigger.

Exercising power, wanting to be different, wanting to stand out is the driving force that separates us from others ("all living things") and can destroy the fabric of relationships. Power makes it possible to realise "evil", to dispense with the effort of empathy, to obtain the desired resources at the expense of others, to use violence and take revenge, and to derive pleasure from the suffering of others. §5§ Power makes it possible to be evil without having to bear the consequences, i.e. without the possibility of self-correction. Even if Freud's "death drive" has not been scientifically accepted as an interpretative concept for evil human behaviour, it is nevertheless evident that experiencing power can trigger satisfying feelings in the human brain, which motivates many people to commit evil acts if these lead to them feeling "powerful". Evolution has not provided us with natural "gestures of appeasement" according to Lorenz for dealing with members of our own species. Ethical principles such as hospitality and empathy towards strangers, fairness, transparency of intentions and methods, cooperation on an equal footing, advance trust, etc., which are essential for "humane" coexistence and counteract the fear of being short-changed, must therefore be practised and organised in a binding manner, but according to Bregman, they can build on our natural (evolutionary) basic equipment.

"Judgmental decisions" (2nd axiom) are certainly a necessary prerequisite as a means of defence. But protecting what is "human" also requires active resistance against powerful encroachments and the development of strengthened self-confidence and a strong, non-hierarchical community that offers the opportunity to deal with fears, resists the division into "us and them," and does not reinterpret the factual superiority of the stronger (Darwin) as the *right* of the stronger. Effective control of power relations must be established and actively supported again and again. It is about consciously entering into the "drama of freedom" as a self-confident individual who is able and willing to make decisions in the context of the community (autonomy and interdependence). (As "chairperson," I take my interests *and* yours into account when making decisions.) It is also necessary and possible (according to Bregman) to abandon the "facade theory" and believe in oneself and others that friendliness, contact and a willingness to cooperate are more natural to humans (due to evolution) than exploitation, violence against others and selfish greed.

This leads me to conclude that investing trust in others is not naive, but rather an effective and worthwhile intellectual endeavour. Through trust and positive expectations of participants, participatory leaders can utilise the "Pygmalion effect." With its fundamental values and concepts for action, TCI has all the prerequisites to effectively counteract the evil that arises from the establishment of ruthless power relations and evaluative differences between people in the realm of interaction.

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Call-Outs

§1§ Evil basically springs from thoughtlessness and forgetfulness.

§2§ It is not animals that are inhuman, but humans who fail to live up to their responsibilities

§3§ Those in power constantly invent new reasons for their privileges

§4§ Evil actions do not sufficiently and comprehensively recognise interdependence

§5§ Power makes it possible to be evil without having to bear the consequences

* all quotes are translated by DeepL Pro