

Ophir distinguishes between *evils* and *Evil*. Evils concern concrete cases of disvalue, occurrences of offence or of pain. Evil instead concerns the *systematic production and distribution of evils*. Evil is therefore an authentic dimension of reality; it is not a transcendent entity (p. 11).¹ Nevertheless, Evil is never apparent as such. What is apparent are only evils—in the plural—as specific entities which exist with their specific objective and subjective characteristics (p. 14). Some evils, from hypocrisy to arrogance to dishonesty to betrayal, are commonplace occurrences.

For Ophir, “Evil is not a negative value. Neither is it the lack of a positive value, or a feature of various states of affairs, human beings, or acts, which may possess other features and exist, equally, without evil. Evil is part of that which is; Evil belongs to the order of things and existents.” (p. 35) In general terms, “evils are simply those bad things that happen to human beings and make their lives difficult. Evils are among those things that human beings cause other human beings, produce for them and distribute among them. For the one who consumes them—the one who is hurt—evils are always superfluous; for the one who produces and distributes them, evils are always preventable; there is always another way.” (p. 324).

Ophir’s proposal operates as a kind of gestaltic reversal. One “should interpret what evil is before [one] determines what the good, the just, or the proper are.” (p. 13). This sentence seemingly indicates that Ophir regards values and disvalues as closely correlated. If so, his proposal consists in a reversal of the point of departure of ethics, in that it replaces the usual strategy of starting from values with a new strategy which starts from disvalues. Hence his proposal does not affect the traditional view of solidarity—albeit by complement—between values and disvalues.

Ophir emphasises that his theory does not alter the central structures of morality when he writes that “morality does not need new foundations; it needs a renewed language.” (p. 25).

A superfluous evil is an evil that can be prevented but is not; it is an evil that can be alleviated but is not (p. 24). The superfluity of evils is precisely the essence of Evil (p. 27).

The idea of the superfluity of evil is obviously taken from Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Ophir’s proposal is to refine and generalize the idea of this superfluity, recognizing that it is not restricted to a few extreme cases of totalitarianism but is the ontological nature of Evil (p. 170).

Figure 1 illustrates the types of evil distinguished by Ophir and their relations.

The territory of evils described by Ophir is articulated along two directrices: on the one hand we have the line of objective evils which begins with disap-

¹ Ophir adds that he has sought to think of “Evil outside the halo of the name ‘Auschwitz’” (p. 22). The theme is resumed later: “in the form of hyperbole, this entire work could be said to be an attempt to find a way of talking about Auschwitz without presupposing ‘the meaning of Auschwitz’ and without presupposing Auschwitz to be some negative pole, an apotheosis, as it were, that every discussion of Evil has both to lead to and to end with, in a predetermined, teleological manner.” (p. 532).

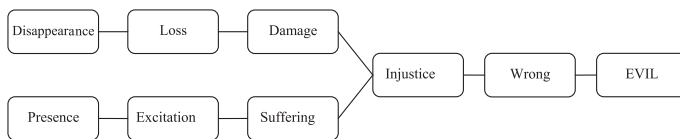


Figure 1. The geography of evils

pearance and continues with loss and damage; on the other, we have the subjective line which begins with the presence of evil and continues with excitation and suffering (p. 166). The two directrices—objective and subjective—then merge together in a single directrix which comprises injustice, wrong and Evil (p. 323). Each item in the series of evils has a positive complement, the series of which can be considered the directrix of goods. We thus have appearance, possession and benefit for the objective directrix of goods, and absence, indifference and pleasure for its subjective counterpart. As in the previous case, these two series also merge together and continue through distributive justice, reparative justice, and Good.

With respect to goods, “the concept of evils has a relative advantage: it distinctly belongs at one and the same time to the realm of moral dissuasion and to the phenomenology of experience, to the physics of the movement of loss or excitation, to the geography of damage or suffering. Evils are both a link in the order of things and a link in the proper moral order. This, though, is an imprecise formulation. In fact, the concept of evils eliminates the radical difference between what is there and what is (morally) proper, or, to use the common idiom, between is and ought. If a single intuition guides the text throughout, it is that there is no radical difference between what is there and what is (morally) proper, that human reality, as what is always already there, contains the possibility of morality as organic matter contains the possibility of life and life contains the possibility of consciousness.” (p. 324)

I have quoted that passage from Ophir in its entirety because it reveals the presence of aspects which require important categorial specifications that Ophir does not provide.

Presence and disappearance, the initial stages of the two directrices of movement, “are two base camps situated at the foot of the mountain, on either side. The apex is the concept of Evil; the view from the top is a new field of morality.” (p. 311) Ophir recognizes that his route of analysis may not be the only one, however: “it may very well be that other routes will lead in the end to nearby summits.” (p. 312)

The first three stations along the two directrices—objective and subjective—of evil have the same architectonic structure: the second station is the intensification of the first, and the third is the intensification of the second.

Intensification takes many forms. For example, “the intensification of Evil can be traced in terms of the length of time over which evils are suffered, of the geographic space throughout which they are distributed, of the depth of their penetration into various areas of living, of the forces of their rule over the matrix of the lifeworld of individuals and groups, of how systematically they are distributed, of the chances of escaping the system that produces and distributes them.” (325)

For Ophir, all the multiple forms of Evil—cruelty, humiliation, sin, lust, etc.—are particular aspects or forms of the types of evil in its series, and in par-

ticular of suffering or loss (p. 39). More generally, writes Ophir, "I suppose that any other imaginable kind of evil could fall into the category of hurting someone, the clearest form of which is suffering, or the category of hurting something that belong to someone (or what could have been his), thus causing loss and damage." (p. 328)

Moving to the second line of reasoning, 'presence' denotes the relation between *someone* and *something*. Excitation is the intensification of presence relatively to one's own expectations (p. 165). Suffering is a further intensification which hurts the person who feels it.

Excitation is one of the two ways in which presence is intensified. The other is reflection (p. 217). Further intensification of excitation may become suffering or pleasure. Excitation may become excessive either because it lasts too long or becomes too profound (p. 229).

Ophir's two "seemingly contradictory" statements concerning the structural conditions of suffering are interesting. Firstly, there is an inverse relation between the effectiveness of communication channels (credibility of the transmission, density of the network, accessibility, transparency of the message, etc.), on the one hand, and the increase in suffering and its cost for the suffering individual and his environment, on the other. Secondly, developed, efficient and functional communication channels increase the suffering expressed, heighten the desire to manifest suffering, reduce the desire and the ability to deny suffering, and in general furnish new ways to experience suffering (p. 264).

These observations by Ophir, however, verge on the banal. Any social worker knows full well the situation pompously described by Ophir. The availability *in loco* of services immediately reduces the tolerance threshold and induces the expression of needs and demands which were previously repressed. For that matter, what are service providers supposed to do? Refrain from providing services?

Every person who suffers has a threshold above which the suffering takes control over him or her. The form of control that the suffering may assume exceeds any possible form of control exerted by others. I can always reject control by others, but "when suffering controls me, it truly controls me, because it expropriates my self and takes over me, seizes my ability to decide when to keep silent and when to scream, until it expropriates my ability to act at all." (p. 268)

Every offence which worsens the condition of someone is an evil. When the evil is incorporated into a system of exchange which permits the value of the loss to be calculated, then damage ensues (p. 35). Damage is a loss formulable as a devaluation in terms of a system of exchange (p. 127). If there is no devaluation, by definition there is no damage.

Devaluation results from one of two differences, and sometimes from both: "the gap between what was there and what is there; the gap between what could have been and what is there." (p. 129). And again: "the expression of a loss is inserted into an exchange system in order to assess the extent to which the damage may have been preventable and to assess what is required in order to mend it." (p. 129) Determining damage "requires establishing a causal relation between what has happened (disappearance and loss) and what could have happened (the ability to prevent the loss and what might have happened if it hadn't occurred)." (p. 131)

Likewise, “injustice is superfluous suffering, which may have been, or may still be, prevented or alleviated, but it isn’t. Wrong is suffering that is inexpressible ... and/or whose existence cannot be proved.” (p. 165)

The difference between injustice and wrong is “one of knowledge and recognition, or their lack.” “A superfluous evil that must not be tolerated is an *injustice*. An unexpressed evil or an evil whose expression has no addressee is a *wrong*.” (p. 341)

To sum up, Evil is not so much a more severe injustice as “the ordered appearance of acts of injustice and wrongdoing.” (p. 166) Evil is not “a terrible wrong, but a terrible order of wrongs.” (p. 318)

Ophir’s ample analysis shows—as he himself has declared, for that matter—that the aim of his theory is not to provide a new categorial framework for ethics, but to look at ethics from a new perspective, so to speak. The idea is certainly of interest and is worth repeating. However, if we go beyond the expressive redundancies and pointlessly expressionist language of Ophir’s book and appraise it carefully, we find that it starts from excessively rigid assumptions. Ophir defends the idea of an essential solidarity between values and disvalues. Values and disvalues have the same structural architecture in which each is defined in default of the other. Aside from the indubitable interest of some of Ophir’s *local* analyses, the *global* architecture of his theory is essentially questionable. I, for one, am not ready to accept the thesis that values and disvalues, goods and evils, exactly correspond to each other and that the architecture of the two fields is the same. As far as moral values are concerned, the following may help in seeing the difference between the organization of values and the organization of disvalues: “justice and love for others are mutually exclusive in certain essential respects: but injustice and a lack of love never exclude each other in any kind of relationship; they are only non-virtues of differing content, and a person may manifest both of them without the slightest incoherence in his behaviour.” (N. Hartmann, *Ethics*, 2nd v., cp. 61) This is evidenced by the fact that love for others may go together with injustice, in the same way as justice may well combine with a lack of love. Even if we accept that primary values and disvalues are individually antithetical to each other, this does not entail that the system of reciprocal dependencies in the world of values must be isomorphous (i.e. correspond exactly) with the system of reciprocal dependencies in the world of disvalues.

Ophir himself declares that the central idea of his book is that there is a detectable order of the production and distribution of superfluous evil (p. 26 and elsewhere).

Some institutions are structurally configured, as it were, so that they produce large quantities of evil. It is therefore advisable to pay close attention “to paradigmatic situations and institutions in which the logic of the production and distribution of evils becomes manifest—for example, a concentration camp, an army base, a regime of occupation, a state of war, a disintegrating family.” (p. 18)

One of the features that induces certain institutions to produce a great deal of evil is the difficulty of entering or exiting them: “situations and institutions that clearly separate the inside from the outside, where the cost of entering and exiting is high (prison, for instance, but marriage or group travel as well), tend

to have a greater volume of evils than situations that feature a low exit or entrance price.” (pp. 17–18).²

Ophir’s book certainly conducts valuable analysis of individual evils. Unfortunately, it is written in accordance with the expressionist canons of a certain type of modern French philosophy, so that after a while it becomes unbearably irksome to read.³ Moreover, the book would be much better if its author had condensed into 200 pages what he instead takes almost 700 to express. Besides these ‘exterior’ shortcomings, however, the essential problem with Ophir’s work is its basic thesis that the realms of values and disvalues have the same underlying architecture. The decision to describe ethics starting from one or the other realm is only a matter of emphasis, with no bearing on the nature of ethics. I believe that it would be much more interesting (and correct) to acknowledge that values and disvalues comply with different architectonic principles and that their dialectic is considerably more complex than transpires from Ophir’s treatment.

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Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study. PAISLEY LIVINGSTON. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. xviii + 251.

Art and Intention is the first work to attempt to assess the proper role that an appeal to artist’s intentions should play across a broad array of issues in the philosophy of art. There are countless discussions of the relevance of such intention to interpreting artworks, and to a lesser extent, to their nature and individuation. What there has not been until now is the systematic attempt to examine the place of intention in issues that range from the creation to the reception of art, from ontology to axiology, from individual artworks to oeuvres.

Livingston begins his monograph with a discussion of the nature of intention, which is another topic that has rarely received sufficiently detailed attention in the philosophy of art. This makes the chapter important and noteworthy, even though the purpose here is not to make an original contribution. Rather Livingston surveys the literature and identifies a most reasonable view, that is then consistently put to work in the subsequent chapters. Intentions are propositional attitudes in their own right, not reducible to some combination of other attitudes. They are about future actions as conceived in a plan, which one has settled on trying to execute. Intentions function to initiate intentional activity and practical reasoning, to adjust behavior in progress, and

² The fact that certain properties of a system depend on the properties of its boundaries has been much studied by systems analysts. For example, more closed systems tend to be more hierarchical than more open ones; they tend to mark out the difference between insiders and the others, who are seen as outsiders if not as enemies, etc.

³ The quotations given from Ophir’s text are only those that are immediately intelligible, with the most vaporous parts of the text omitted.