

From the Editors

Last August, Societas Ethica organized its 54th annual conference in Volos, Greece. The conference invited ethics from philosophical and theological perspectives to reflect on the theme 'Giving an Account of Evil'. Most of the articles in this issue were presented at the conference.

The 'problem of evil' has been an important topic for both theological and philosophical reflections throughout history. The question of how an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God could create a world in which there is evil has occupied both theologians and philosophers, although the reasons for approaching this query have been rather divergent. Analyses of the concept of evil and what counts as instances of evil are also manifold and often conflicting. Even the very usefulness of giving an account of evil is something on which views part. Some have argued that evil is an utterly meaningless concept which should be abandoned, while others maintain that the term evil connotes something that is an essential part of human life and experience.

For theologians and practical philosophers, questions concerning the relationship between evil and morality are of central importance. What is the relation between evil and concepts such as badness and wrongdoing? Of what practical relevance is an account of evil? What is the moral significance of different accounts of evil? Do the answers that we offer to the problem of evil have to be 'morally responsible' or follow certain moral standards?

A guiding assumption in this, the effort of giving an account of evil, is that different explanations and descriptions of evil are not neutral, but rather depend on the different views of the world that people have. This of course includes scholars working on the issue. Theological ethics, as well as other forms of critical inquiry, makes this insight central as it pays special attention to the interplay between different traditions' ideas about life and their moral views. This is also discernible in the articles in this issue as they all treat evil as an 'embedded' issue: as a concept that is interpreted in relation to different social institutions such as morality, politics, and religion. The articles all relate their accounts of evil to central discussions in these contexts.

In this issue, we present four articles which offer conceptual analyses from within both theological and philosophical traditions. In his article 'Evil as a Distortion of Communication: On Hegel's account of Evil as Subjectivism', Martin Sticker discusses Hegel's conception of evil, and his claim that evil is the 'internal actual, absolute certainty of itself, the pure night of being for itself'. According to Sticker, Hegel discusses evil because he worries about how Romanticism and the romantic ideal of authenticity impact on the possibility of communication. Evil is, in Hegel's understanding, primarily a

distortion of communication. This account of evil helps us to distinguish between evil and mere moral badness. Sticker's argument is that Hegel's early conception of evil, which draws on a very different paradigm than the current philosophical discourse on evil, can give us new insights and thus stimulate the on-going discussion on the concept of evil.

In the article 'On the Relevance of the Concept of Intrinsic Evil: Francisco Suárez and Contemporary Catholic Virtue Ethics Approaches', Nenad Polgar explores the relevancy of the concept of intrinsic evil in contemporary Catholic theological ethics. Polgar discusses a historical example, Francisco Suarez, as well as two contemporary positions in Catholic theological ethics on the viability of the concept of intrinsic evil. Polgar argues that we can better understand their disagreement by looking at various ways in which the concept of intrinsic evil can be used. In the end, Polgar argues in favor of discarding the concept of intrinsic evil from theological ethics since it offers no credible method for ethical analysis.

According to Ronnie Hjorth, we find an account of evil in classical political theory in the notion of evil government. A central idea among classical political theorists is that of *political decay*, whereby government turns from good to evil, or to anarchy. In his article 'Political Decay and Political Arcadianism', Hjorth contends that political decay remains a persistent problem as the political condition involves the seeds to its own destruction. Hjorth further argues that the nostalgic longing for a glorious past for nations or peoples risks turning into what he labels as 'political arcadianism', which, when focusing on the imagined past rather than the present, is a possible cause of political decay.

Chris A. Kramer, in his article 'Moral Imaginative Resistance to Heaven: Why the Problem of Evil is so Intractable', goes in to dialogue with replies to the problem of evil which argue that God permits evils to allow for future possible rewards in heaven. Kramer argues that while we can imagine that God is an omnibenevolent parent who permits evil in order to allow morally significant freedom and the rewards in heaven or punishments in hell, we should not. Rather, we should resist, practicing a form of moral imaginative resistance, and refuse to go along with the imaginative construction that the suffering of innocent children is part of God's divine plan, and ultimately just given the possible future state of heaven.

We are pleased to present an issue that contains articles which offer reflections on the problem and concept of evil from a variety of perspectives. We see it as a strength to bring together theological-ethical and moral-philosophical analyses and accounts of evil, and our hope is that this will contribute to further critical investigations of the problem and concept of evil. In this, we believe that both theological ethics and practical philosophy have critical resources to offer, and that a continuous conversation between them is vital in the pursuit of credible responses to this very complex issue.