

## THE PLACE OF MAN IN THE ONTOLOGY OF EVIL: A. CAMUS vs J.-P. SARTRE



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The article deals with the ontological dimension of evil in the philosophies of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre. The author compares the philosophers' atheistic views on the ontology of evil and analyzes the relationship between the philosophers' world outlooks, Christian ethics and the essence of God. Death is viewed as the sentenced to death criminals' becoming aware of their own non-existence by J. Sartre and as an integral part of the incomprehensible evil by A. Camus. The author also focuses on the differences between the philosophies of A. Camus and J. Sartre regarding the fairness of human actions from the standpoint of morality and absolute freedom of action.

**Key words:** *ontology of evil, being, God, justice, evil of death, rebellion, death penalty*

### **Problem statement.**

It is difficult to establish when man began to think about the emergence of evil, and especially about the definition of the concept of evil. In ancient myths and religious beliefs, which were built on the principles of polytheism, evil did not have a clear form, but rather was defined as an assessment of the activities of either man or God. The first known attempt to distinguish evil from good is the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism. Although Zoroastrianism as a belief has survived to this day and the figure of Zoroaster undoubtedly inspired F. Nietzsche to develop a new superman's morality, which opposed Christianity, Zoroastrianism as a religious doctrine did not complete the transition to monotheism and the formation of the entities of good and evil. Nevertheless, the basic concepts of Zoroastrianism contributed to the ontology of good and evil in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which are the world's leading monotheistic religions, and had a tremendous impact on the historical development of many countries.

The formation and dissemination of monotheistic religions and their dogmatic influence on the worldview of people present the problem of defining the basic concepts of religious morality - good and evil, as well as measuring their ontological essence. Polytheistic beliefs do not attempt to explain the ontology of evil, while perceiving evil as the original givenness, the component of nature necessary for the flow of one element of nature into another. Monotheistic religions try to determine the ontology of evil, but the separation of evil from the One and Undivided God, who a priori is the Creator and Absolute of Good, drives believers into a deadlock of perceiving for granted, but does not encourage logical reasoning over the basic ideas of religion. There are serious contradictions between faith and reason,

theodicy and pantheism, deism and atheism, which gradually undermine the foundations of religion and destroy the religious moral principles.

The problem of ontology of evil becomes one of the main problems of the philosophy of anthropology in the countries that formed their philosophical thinking on the principles of ancient philosophy and Christian morality. The historical process of the development of philosophical thought in Western Europe, of course, determines the problem of good and evil, being one of the main problems of philosophy, which is especially relevant in the twentieth century as a response to the terrible events of world wars, cataclysms, revolutions, and most importantly, as a rebellion against the killing of people and the possible death of mankind. The liberation of man-slave from the

rule of God-Master, the de-deification of the human mind, and later man in general, which was initiated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, led to revolutions, the development of the values of Nazism, fascism, communism and to the millions of victims of the new principles of good and evil. So, the twentieth century witnessed a new round of rethinking of ethical principles. And one of the first to return to the theme of moral values and the meaning of human existence were philosophers-existentialists. The greatest figures among existentialist philosophers are unquestionably believed to be Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. Their philosophical reflections are filled with many contradictions and rethinkings of the philosophical heritage of eminent thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

**Analysis of the research base.** Because the philosophical interests of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre are ambiguous and varied, contemporary researchers often analyze in detail some of their views and overlook others. Moreover, it is difficult to remain indifferent to the problems raised by A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre, and to conduct an objective study. The philosophers themselves often had to give journalistic answers to biased criticism. In the post-Soviet space, the creative heritage of the philosophers accused of proclaiming bourgeois values was disregarded and only in rare cases was subjectively criticized. In contrast, the views of the communist philosophers were widely recognized and popularized in the educational circles. A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre were contrasted for a long time by Soviet researchers. Thus, M. Kissel explores in depth the neo-Marxism of J.-P. Sartre, while E.P. Kushkin dwells only on the early works of A. Camus neglecting his opus magnum *The Rebel*. In Ukraine, the philosophies of J.-P. Sartre and A. Camus have been studied by a few scholars. The ontological approach to human relations and being in the works of J.-P. Sartre have been analyzed by V.S. Vozniak in his *Metaphysics of Understanding and Reason*. The scientist notes J.-P. Sartre's construct of subject-subjective peer relationship between man and the Other. Of interest seem to be the comparisons of the philosophies of J.-P. Sartre, M. Heidegger and N. Abbagnano, made by T. Matyukh, K. Rida, O. Besliubnyak, O. Petriv and V. Zakrevsky.

Among the foreign researchers of the philosophical heritage of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre B.-A. Levy, V. Descombes, O. Bolnov, E. Schutz and P. Strathern are worth mentioning. Although these researchers were mainly interested in the philosophers' (especially J.-P. Sartre's) political views and the construction of the philosophical idea of being as the Other, the absurdity of the search for the meaning of human existence and the dominance of man over history, they also touched on the problems of humanism, morality, the relationship between freedom and the responsibility for evil in the works of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre. It should be noted that the subject of evil and its role in human life and history occupies the basic place in the works of both thinkers.

**The aim of this research** is to determine the ontology of evil and the place of man in relation to evil in the philosophies of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre. The research objectives include: 1) the establishment of the origin and nature of evil in the philosophies of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre; 2) the comparison of the Christian ontology and demonology of evil and the philosophical atheistic ideas of evil put forward by A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre; 3) the analysis of the philosophies of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre in regard to the importance of evil in human history and the absurdity of man's existence in the freedom formation.

**Discussion.** In the philosophies of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre evil is in the being of the individuals themselves when they act as the creators of evil through their own judgment about evil. Along with the evil created by man, there is another evil that makes man helpless, although man can not only observe this evil, but even bring it into their own being and in human history itself. Thus, man rebels against this evil, but at the very extremes of the rebellion, as A. Camus notes, man cannot rebel without this evil. A. Camus clearly distinguishes between the two evils. "There is an evil, undoubtedly, which men accumulate in their frantic desire for unity. But yet another evil lies at the roots of this inordinate movement. Confronted with this evil, confronted with death, man from the very depths of his soul cries out for justice" [4, p. 357]. That is, A. Camus notes that man becomes the creator of evil only because there is already the evil that man can

understand and comprehend, but he cannot overcome the master evil. When an individual feels his/her own helplessness when the evil of death comes, he/she tries to arrange it somehow. Thus, the Emperor Caligula in the philosophical play by A. Camus begins to kill people according to his own philosophy of striving for power over what cannot be controlled. French authorities use guillotine as a means of arranging the death of criminals for the sake of future golden age. "The society has learned to whiten everything that helps to bring this future closer, including the death penalty, which is used without restrictions. From that moment on, the society began to regard as a crime and sacrilege everything that contradicts the society's intentions and short-lived dogmas. In other words, the executioner changed from the priest to a functionary." [3, p. 164].

The evil of death has its own being, which is close to the being of man, touches on man's consciousness and then destroys human existence. The human mind becomes powerless in the face of death, which it feels physically, and at the infinite abyss of evil, which cannot be determined by either religious beliefs or political utopias. Man rebels against this evil, but this rebellion is infinite, it links one human life to another creating a string of beads made up of human births and deaths.

J.-P. Sartre, like A. Camus, pays attention to the incomprehensible attractiveness of people's death and, most importantly, the desire to control it. A Belgian doctor, depicted in J.-P. Sartre's story *The Wall*, spends the whole night with the revolutionaries condemned to death. He has a purely scientific interest in these people who know about the death sentence and, having no opportunity to escape it, are trying to realize the evil of their own death. The guardians do not care about the convicts at all, one of them even has a good night sleep, they are not concerned neither with the sentence itself, nor with its possible injustice. The guardians are separated from the idea of death, and therefore they are unable to draw parallels between the death of the revolutionaries, the death of an abstract person and their own deaths in the unknown future.

Moreover, Camus in his *Reflections on the Guillotine* and *The First Man* draws attention to the human conviction that the death penalty may be fair, at least in relation to the

killers. If distanced, this penalty is seen as a pleasure of revenge taken by society on those who dare to violate its laws, it is a sort of main town square show, just like a visiting artists' performance. At least, this is how an individual perceives death until they come close to death and experience other people's fears of this evil and start thinking about the justice of punishment. But these are few cases in history, as for the most part people crave for justice and believe that death penalty should somehow balance good and evil in society. In other words, to be good, one must be evil.

Both philosophers investigate the problem of human involvement in the evil of death. J.-P. Sartre clearly conveys all feeling of death closeness experienced by the characters of *The Wall*. A. Camus reveals this problem by the main character's reflections in *The Stranger* and by the understanding of death in his plays *Caligula*, *The Plague* and *The Just*.

J.-P. Sartre reveals not only the psychological aspect of the problem of death, but also its metaphysical component. The philosopher points out how the existence of the evil of death penetrates into the existence of the condemned and seems to remove a person from this existence. "But I too found that objects had a funny look: they were more obliterated, less dense than usual. It was enough for me to look at the bench, the lamp, the pile of coal dust, to feel that I was going to die. Naturally I couldn't think clearly about my death but I saw it everywhere, on things, in the way things fell back and kept their distance, discreetly, as people who speak quietly at the bedside of a dying man." [7] The convicts keep reflecting on the proximity of the death penalty, imagining the shooting. They cannot comprehend how they manage to see clearly the picture of the shooting, their own bodies are separated from them. "I see my corpse; that's not hard but I'm the one who sees it, with my eyes. I've got to think... think that I won't see anything anymore and the world will go on for the others. We aren't made to think that, Pablo. Believe me: I've already stayed up a whole night waiting for something. But this isn't the same: this will creep up behind us, Pablo, and we won't be able to prepare for it." [7]. The author of the story brings them very closely to the questions: Who am I? Is the body my property or is it just one of the components of human existence until death breaks away

myself and pushes it out into the vast depths? But it is not necessary to look for answers, the answers belong to evil, and therefore only those who crossed the Rubicon can answer these questions, whereas a living person, even condemned to death, is still alive. The wall of one's own living existence separates from the death existence.

Hence, death is indeed an indisputable fact of ending the biological existence of both man and other living beings. But a question arises as to how immensely evil is associated with death in terms of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre, that is, whether the death is an ontological dimension of absolute evil.

Exploring the philosophers' works, one can see their desire to reflect on death more than on the very concept of evil. Although the existence of evil outside of human existence is determined by A. Camus as an undeniable fact, it is difficult to justify the emergence of evil outside the Christian world, unlike the question of human morality and its relation to the creation of evil in being. A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre are defined by many researchers as atheists. But their atheism cannot be called atheism that does not require proof, because the lack of faith in afterlife is not yet evidence of the lack of faith as such. Both philosophers turn to Christian philosophy more than once. Moreover, their attempts to explain the essence of good and evil exclusively from the perspective of human consciousness turn out to be unsuccessful when they distance from Christian categories. Although J.-P. Sartre is even more consistent in this than A. Camus, he does not succeed in distancing himself from the Christian tradition. Reflecting on the subject of evil, the French philosophers address the problem of the theodicy and the Satan. They do not try to justify God for the emergence of Evil, as do S. Bulgakov, M. Berdyaev, M. Buber, K. Jaspers and other existentialist philosophers. However, even following the atheism fashion of the mid-twentieth century, they face the problem of rational definition of the ontology of evil. Thus, A. Camus recognizes the existence of evil, in the face of which man is powerless, because this evil has nothing to do with man who cannot, even with all his might, become the master of this evil. But the philosopher ignores the problem of the essence of evil, while the Christian church considers the Satan as the epitome of evil, although it denies the equality of God and the Satan as the creators

of good and evil, which are equal in their power. Evil, as such, is much weaker in Christian doctrines than good, so its power depends on the number of people who choose to create evil and their ability to act in the name of Evil.

J.-P. Sartre's philosophical views on this issue are not as pessimistic as A. Camus'. J.-P. Sartre stands on humanism, as evidenced by the title of one of his main works *Existentialism is Humanism*. Unlike A. Camus, J.-P. Sartre defines himself as an existentialist philosopher, and he himself is determined to name those thinkers who belong to this philosophy. V. Descombes notes that J.-P. Sartre refuses to recognize the existence of God, but does not refuse to recognize the existence of divine attributes. Thus, he moves further than humanists of the Renaissance. J.-P. Sartre does not raise man to God, but replaces God with man. "Classical atheism rejected the divine attributes, calling them uncomprehensible, because they were infinite or incompatible with each other. Humanistic atheism recognizes their existence and belonging to the human agent, who thus becomes a true God. It is this substitution, thanks to which everywhere, where people used to write "God", they began to write "man", that determines humanism. It is in this context that Sartre and his associates will raise the name of a humanist after 1945" [1, p. 33].

Another point that can be noted in the philosophy of J.-P. Sartre is an attempt to determine the essence of evil and good. In 1951, Théâtre-Antoine staged a play by the philosopher *The Devil and the Good Lord*. The play is focused on finding the answer to the question of what good is and what evil is. Goetz, the play's main character, differs from A. Camus' Caligula. Unlike the Roman emperor, he clearly differentiates good and evil, and, like a medieval Christian, identifies the masters of good and evil. Although God is constantly mentioned by all the characters of the play and the devil even seems to clergy Heinrich, they are not in any way manifested in the work. J.-P. Sartre introduces their vague images into the play in order to highlight the problem of identifying good and evil by people from the perspective of Christianity.

Goetz rushes from evil to good, once he opposes God, then he tries to come to terms with Him, but in both cases, he does not get

what he wanted to. " I killed God because he divided me from mankind, and now I see that His death has isolated me even more surely. I shall not allow this huge carcass to poison my human friendships" [6]. An important point in the play is not only the issue of peoples' correct understanding of good and evil, but the fact that Goetz as a humanist, who rebels against his own destiny, actually shares the destiny of God, before whom people either tremble or obey, but never perceive as equal. God is lonelier than the devil with all his disadvantages. The philosopher even mocks the clergy's friendship with the devil.

The play does not feature the idea put forward by M. Heidegger concerning the void of the divine place. Goetz undeniably acknowledges the existence of God and he can kill God, but he cannot deny him the existence, because the recognition of His absence as such makes life even more absurd than it is. Another thing is God's justice. J.-P. Sartre comes to the same conclusion as A. Camus: evil in no way can be fair. But good deeds sometimes have bad consequences. It is easier for man to blame God for the unjust division of the world and to rebel against Him. Hilda summarizes the Ivan Karamazov's idea about the unfair distribution of good among all people. "Thy elect—idiots, who have the heart to rejoice while there are damned souls writhing in hell and poor people on earth. I am on the side of humanity, and I will not desert my fellow beings." [6]. But even having killed God, it is difficult to take on His functions. Goetz tries to be absolutely good like God, but being kind does not necessarily mean being fair.

Thus, the J.-P. Sartre philosophy's leitmotif is the impossibility of the existence of God as an absolute good in the Christian sense. People do not clearly distinguish between good and evil, and therefore their attempts to create the image of God as a source of good only are fruitless, because there is no way of distinguishing the loneliness of good from the loneliness of evil. The consequences of good deeds are even worse than the actions determined by the main character as those to multiply evil. Hilda rebels against the divine injustice of Paradise being for saints, and hell for sinners. This is not just a tear of Ivan Karamazov's child, it is a surprise that the saints can rejoice in paradise, whereas the overwhelming majority of people are doomed to hell.

J.-P. Sartre notes that if saints can enjoy the pleasures of paradise knowing about the infernal torments of others, they can hardly be considered saints. If they are not saints, they have no right to be in paradise. God cannot be both good and fair at the same time, as stated in Christian ethics. If He was perfectly good, he would not be able to divide people into sinners and righteous, but would let everyone into paradise and would ban sorrow at all, to say nothing of eternal sorrow. However, justice requires punishment for sinners, otherwise it makes no sense to be righteous. Why suffer on earth, and then get the same fate for everyone after death.

The Christian tradition recognizes the divine origin of the good and the Satanic origin of evil. Atheism stands on different beliefs. Atheist philosophers must either categorically deny the existence of good and evil, or determine their ontology, which is very difficult to do. Denying the existence of good and evil means denying a person freedom of choice and freedom of self-determination. J.-P. Sartre, as a philosopher who is an advocate of absolute freedom, cannot do this. He determines the ontology of good and evil based on the essence of man, breaking the foundations of European morality built on Christian ethics. The philosopher determines the essence and ontological dimension of man himself, who has nothing than his own being. In fact, the theme of good and evil in the philosophy of J.-P. Sartre raises the problems of determination of being, the essence of man and absolute freedom.

Researchers of J.-P. Sartre's philosophy note that his desire to determine the ontology of human existence leads him to study human consciousness and psychoanalysis. "... Sartre deduces important conclusions from atheism. The most important of these is the following: if there is no God, there is no a universal moral law and a set of absolute values. Therefore, in his lecture on humanism, he can say: "Dostoevsky wrote that if God did not exist, everything was allowed. This is the starting point for existentialism." Man is the only source of values, he has to create or choose his own hierarchy of values, his own ideal. However, this "he has" does not bring happiness. The fact is that man cannot avoid freedom and cannot avoid acting in the world. Even if he chooses to commit a suicide, he still chooses and acts" [5, pp. 220-221].

The conclusions made by J.-P. Sartre about the absence of the social and moral law are not shared by A. Camus. In *The Rebel* he develops the idea of F. Dostoevsky that the lack of a moral law changes a person into a being that renounces the freedom of rebellion and eventually loses to the absurdity of being. The philosopher, in contrast to J.-P. Sartre, rejects the idea of creating evil for the sake of the future good, because the evil that is rationally embedded in human history loses boundaries, enslaves people and makes the absurdity of existence completely evil. "Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present. Rebellion proves in this way that it is the very movement of life and that it cannot be denied without renouncing life. ... Revolution without honor, calculated revolution which, in preferring an abstract concept of man to a man of flesh and blood, denies existence as many times as is necessary, puts resentment in the place of love" [4, p. 358].

A. Camus notes that the rebellion has its own limit and opposes the absolute. The main value of the rebellion is justice. Justice cannot be limited, it is universal. Absolute freedom does not exist, any attempt to erase the boundaries of freedom by someone makes others revolt. So, a slave will tolerate the unjust actions of his owner and raises the rebellion when the master trespasses the invisible boundaries of their freedoms. Hence, a person is free to choose between good and evil, but choosing it he/she has to be aware of the universal rules of the game, whose violation can lead to tragic consequences.

The main rule of doing good or evil, as determined by A. Camus, is the payment for the action and the action's fairness. The

philosopher notes that the 1905 Russian revolutionaries understood this rule very well. They were willing to pay their own lives for the lives of the country rulers as a fair revenge on them for the disgrace done to the people. But their thirst for punishment did not spread to those whom they thought would be unfair to deprive of life. "Brothers, I want to speak frankly and at least tell you what the simplest of peasants could say: to kill children is without honor. And if someday in my life, the revolution separates itself from honor, I will turn away from it." [2, p. 27]. Man can act within the boundaries of good and evil, and only within them, but for every act he will bear responsibility toward himself and society. A. Camus does not share J.-P. Sartre's views on the nature of evil and its existence in human consciousness, otherwise, one could easily call black white and white black compromising their conscience and committing lawlessness as a virtue.

J.-P. Sartre's ideas about the ontology of evil in relation to man's awareness of being addresses the problem of peoples' rational determination of good and evil, which clearly justifies the idea of God's non-existence. Having placed God in human consciousness, the philosopher tempts a man to put himself into the place of God to have unlimited freedom of action. A. Camus recognizes the existence of another unknown being, although he does not recognize the existence of God. J.-P. Sartre refuses to recognize any other existence, except that in which a person acts, but J.-P. Sartre does not limit man's existence believing that even after his death man exists, although this existence is not available to consciousness and is not observed by other people.

## Conclusion.

The ontology of evil in the philosophy of A. Camus and J.-P. Sartre is connected with man's existence. However, both philosophers have narrowed evil to human death. A. Camus acknowledges the existence of the evil of death as an independent being, which is beyond man's understanding, although man attempts to conquer death, at least partly (death penalty, murder, euthanasia). J.-P. Sartre, by contrast, erases the faces of human existence in such a way that it absorbs the existence of God, therefore neither good, nor evil have any other creator except man. And it is only man who can change these extremes.

However, J.-P. Sartre fails to be fully consistent in his reasoning about the place of man in relation to the ontology of evil. He places the unlimited human freedom above morality, making it necessary to treat absolute freedom as the context of human morality. Another important issue analyzed by J.-P. Sartre is human existence and human consciousness within the limits of the existential ethics.

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