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James Hillman's Insights into the Causes of Evil in Human Action*

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The article examines the problem of human evil through the perspective of James Hillman. It addresses two cases: the actions of psychopathic individuals and the mass crimes committed by ordinary people during wartime. Using an interpretive method grounded in depth psychology and supported by references to Socrates, Augustine, Kant, Hare, and Welzer, the text analyses whether evil can be an intentional aim rather than the result of error or weakness. The analysis shows that Hillman challenges the long-standing cultural conviction that evil is always derivative. His conception of the "demonic" or archetypal dimension of violence offers an interpretive framework that complements empirical research. While such an approach does not seek to excuse perpetrators, it does provide a philosophical explanation as to why both psychopaths and ordinary citizens may engage in extreme acts of cruelty.

Keywords: James Hillman, evil, psychopathy, war crimes

* In this article I include several excerpts—translated into English—from my book *Bogusława Wolniewicza etyka życia* [Bogusław Wolniewicz's Ethics of Life, my own translation] (Białystok: University of Białystok Press, 2013), where I discuss the problem of evil in human nature as interpreted by Immanuel Kant and James Hillman.

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When considering the concept of malice in human beings, a fundamental question is whether people are capable of consciously and deliberately pursuing evil for its own sake rather than it being a consequence of misjudgement, miscalculation, or external influences. James Hillman's reflections provide compelling arguments in favour of this possibility. The philosopher speaks of "devilish beings." Socrates, however, maintained that human beings always strive for good and commit evil only out of ignorance.[1] Although our life experience may make this claim difficult to accept, we nonetheless tend to attribute even cruel or bestial acts to external factors—material motives, traumatic childhoods, or various personal afflictions. As a result, most people reject the possibility of evil *itself* being the direct motive behind someone's actions. This denial can be traced back to the earliest layers of our civilisation, to ideas formulated by Socrates and Plato. Hillman challenges this tradition, arguing that human beings can indeed be devilish and capable of acting out of pure malice. They may consciously desire evil and pursue that desire deliberately. Hillman makes this claim explicit and points to psychopaths—particularly serial killers—as paradigmatic examples. His view also sheds light on how ordinary people can rapidly become killers in times of war. It is not psychopaths who are responsible for the majority of wartime atrocities and mass bloodshed, but rather ordinary, law-abiding citizens who possess both a conscience and empathy—people who, in times of peace, would never commit such acts.

Augustine, later recognised as a saint, sought an explanation for the pervasive presence of evil in the world and found consolation, at the age of thirty-three, in receiving baptism. As a Christian thinker, he aimed to defend the goodness and

[1] Leszek Kołakowski, *O co nas pytają wielcy filozofowie* [What the Great Philosophers Ask Us], vol. 1 (Kraków: Znak, 2008), 12–13. The passage cited here is my translation: "Socrates maintains that it is impossible for a person to act of their own free will in a manner they recognise as evil. If one acts in an evil way, it is out of ignorance; when we know what is good, we act accordingly. This idea may appear quite unbelievable to us. We tend to think that we often act wrongly when driven by various passions—hatred, love, greed, lust, or pride. We recognise what is good and evil, yet, as the saying goes, we do not know how to resist these passions. Thus, we understand the truth of Ovid's well-known remark: 'I see and approve the better, yet I follow the worse.' […] Nevertheless, we might pause to ask whether there is some merit in Socrates' view that ignorance is the reason behind the evil we perpetrate. Perhaps our frail reason is simply incapable of clearly distinguishing good from evil. And if that were so, would it not follow that we are, in a sense, innocent in whatever we do?"

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omnipotence of God, and therefore limited his analysis to the moral dimension of evil. Moral evil, he argues, is the work of the human being endowed with free will and burdened with a soul corrupted by the sin of the first parents. Since evil cannot originate from the Good Creator, sin consists in choosing the lesser over the greater good, thereby distancing the human being from the highest Good. Within such a framework, existential evil cannot be chosen, for it does not exist; evil is merely a privation of good. On the basis of such reasoning, the idea that a human being could be "devilish" in Hillman's sense must be rejected.[2] In our cultural tradition, the belief that humanity is inherently good—a view reinforced by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau—has come to assume an almost dogmatic position.

Immanuel Kant likewise rejects the possibility of evil for evil's sake. Although he maintains that the human being is evil by nature (and that a propensity to radical evil is inherent in human nature, as everyday experience suggests), he simultaneously denies that this trait arises from the human species as such—for otherwise it would be necessary rather than contingent. While Kant acknowledges the existence of a propensity to evil in the human being, he does not acknowledge the existence of diabolical evil. As he writes: "The difference between propensity and predisposition is that, while the former can be innate, it can also be classified as an acquired trait (when positive) or a culpable trait (when negative)."[3] For Kant, the human being possesses an internal propensity to evil consisting in the will's capacity to deviate from the moral law—that is, to act contrary to it. Since this deviation involves freedom of the will, Kant considers it contingent, not necessary. In other words, the source of evil is free will, which can coexist with an inclination toward choosing evil. Nevertheless, the human being cannot be a devilish being, for a reason exempting a person from the moral law would be a malign reason—a purely evil will. In such a case, very opposition to the law would itself constitute a motive for action. For Kant, this is unacceptable:

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[2] Augustine, *Wyznania* [Confessions], trans. Zygmunt Kubiak (Kraków: Znak, 2018), Books II, VII, VIII.

[3] Immanuel Kant, *O obecności złego pierwiastka obok dobrego, czyli zło radykalne w naturze ludzkiej*, in Bogusław Wolniewicz, *Filozofia i wartości* [Philosophy and Values], vol. 2 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1998), 352. (Further references to this edition are indicated as "*FiW 2*," followed by page numbers).

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> Even the worst man does not rebelliously reject the moral law, as it were, by refusing to obey it. For there are moral propensities in the human being through which this law imposes itself upon him with irresistible force. And were it not for other motives, he would make it the guiding principle of his conduct and a self-sufficient motive of the will; that is, he would be morally good.[4]

Acknowledging the possibility of a devil-type evil in human beings would therefore contradict the entire framework of Kant's considerations. "Evil in human nature is not malice in the strict sense of the word: it is not a disposition (a subjective source of principles) that would make evil as such a principle of conduct, for then it would be devilish. Rather, it is perversity, also known as an evil heart. It is able to coexist with a generally good will and stems from the frailty of human nature, which is too weak to adhere to principles once adopted."[5] Yet Kant, when discussing the corruption of goodness in human nature, does make reference to certain transgressions as "devilish." The propensities inherent in humanity lead us to constant comparison with others, which in turn gives rise to envy and rivalry. Ingratitude, envy, or the enjoyment of another's misfortune are for Kant "devilish" transgressions—acts that represent a kind of maximal evil, exceeding the bounds of what we typically regard as human. Nevertheless, such examples do not point to the gratuitous performance of evil; these acts arise, for instance, from jealousy, and therefore remain within the realm of humanity, in spite of how morally troubling they may be. Hillman cannot agree with Kant on this point. He rejects the claim that every human being is in possession of a conscience. If there are individuals entirely without conscience, then devilish evil in the strict Kantian sense becomes possible—people who commit evil for evil's sake can exist.

It has been noted that Kant's conception contains a significant deficiency. Barbara Skarga observes that Kant's reflections fail to offer up a decisive solution; they offer no answer to the nature of evil or to the sources from which it arises. As she writes:

> We only know that it is not something explainable by empirics. It remains unexplored and its origins are unknown. It lies somewhere within us, at the very core of our being, or perhaps prior to being, not as a necessity but as an ever-realising possibility. Ethics refers us immediately to metaphysics. Kant's reflections confirm the

[4] Kant, *O obecności złego pierwiastka*, in *FiW 2*, 355.
[5] Ibid., *FiW 2*, 356.

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> conviction that only within the space of the latter does the question of evil as such make sense.[6]

However—and this is the essence of Skarga's objection—Kant's analysis of evil inclinations, motives of the will, and related concepts does not bring us any closer to understanding the nature of evil itself. Kant rejects sensuality as a potential source of evil, for we are not the creators of our inclinations and therefore cannot be held responsible for them. If sensuality were the origin of moral evil, the human being would be stripped of the motives of freedom and would be therefore, merely an animal being. Nor can the source of moral evil be sought in reason, for a reason that repudiated the moral law would be malicious reason, a purely evil will, with the human being thereby becoming devilish. Where, then, ought we seek out its source? Kant maintains that the inclination to evil lies in human nature, yet it is not directly accessible to us; we come to know it only through instances of opposition to the law.

> However, these examples show neither the essence of these inclinations nor the source of this opposition. For their essence lies in the relationship between free will and the moral law, and neither of these concepts is empirical. The inclination to evil is known only a priori, from the very notion of evil, insofar as it is permitted by the laws of freedom—and thus also by the notions of duty and responsibility.[7]

It is therefore clear that Kant does not offer a metaphysical explanation of the nature of evil.

Powerful thinkers within our cultural tradition reject the possibility that a person might pursue evil for its own sake, despite the vast amount of empirical evidence throughout human history documenting acts of cruelty and horror committed by human beings. Yet there are important exceptions to this prevailing view. Among them is the Polish writer Stanisław Lem, who remarked:

> I am surprised and troubled by the existence of people who commit evil acts for no reason and derive considerable pleasure from destroying human destinies, values, and creations. I feel uneasy, sensing that something is wrong here. Disinterested evil

[6] Barbara Skarga, *Kwintet metafizyczny* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 101.
[7] Kant, *O obecności złego pierwiastka*, in *FiW 2*, 355.

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> exists, and I am not at all suggesting, as Augustine did, that it is simply the absence of goodness. There is something more to it—an active intention.[8]

His words express a profound sense of unease and perplexity.

Hillman explicitly states that a human being can possess diabolical traits—he has in mind here extreme psychopaths. In his view, the irrationality of their criminal acts is particularly disturbing; what drives a ruthless offender to do evil appears entirely incomprehensible from a human point of view. In his reflections, Hillman describes individuals who display such devilish traits as people who have come from an *evil seed*. He acknowledges that some explanation for their actions may lie in what he calls the *demonic call*—a voice urging a person to commit evil for its own sake, without any perceivable gain. Hillman cites Hitler, undoubtedly a psychopath, as an example of someone overwhelmed by this demonic impulse, and who—completely consumed by his vision—made it his life's calling.[9] Psychopaths, Hillman argues, are precisely those people born from an evil seed. They are individuals without conscience, and their crimes lack any rational justification. Their actions supply them with a sense of satisfaction of having performed the devil's deed—acts of destruction and malice.[10]

Hillman therefore offers an affirmative answer to the question of whether people can commit evil for evil's sake, contrary to what Socrates, the father of ethics, claimed. According to Hillman, the motivation of psychopathic serial killers is wholly inexplicable, and their crimes are often regarded as senseless and irrational. The meaning of such acts lies outside the human sphere, beyond ordinary human comprehension. Hillman offers the example of the Ukrainian serial killer Andrei Chikatilo, who murdered around fifty people. During his interrogation,

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[8] Stanisław Bereś, "Rozmowy z Lemem (3)," *Odra* 1985, no. 7–8: 35–36; cited in *FiW 2*, 216. My own translation.

[9] "Materialism cannot explain the urge. Hitler did not institute his murder-based nation for economic gains. In fact, the diversion of infrastructure and effort, as his war was being lost, into killing camps cost him immeasurably more than the property confiscated and gold gained. Nor can material poverty account for the Bad Seed—or what Jack Katz, sociologist, calls the 'drive toward deviance'—even if oppressive conditions may well be a major contributing factor"; James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (New York, 1997), Kindle edition, 236.

[10] "The Bad Seed takes pleasure in malice, enjoying destruction"; ibid., 235.

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Chikatilo claimed that *something superhuman, something from the outside* compelled him to kill.[11]

Hillman also speaks of the absence of something fundamentally human—of a void within the character of people from a *bad seed*. He refers to this emptiness as a *hollow* (*lacuna*). It denotes a particular lack of human feeling.[12] This "absence-of-goodness" lacuna may be occupied by other traits such as impulsiveness, narrow-mindedness, the desire for immediate gratification, rigidity of belief, emotional poverty, intellectual stunting, or the inability to feel guilt or remorse. Yet the most crucial, most basic feature is the cold absence of empathy—the total inability to feel compassion toward any living being.[13] Disorders of character are central to the diagnosis of psychopathy and sociopathy. In such cases, there is a lack of something deep and structural within the characters of murderers, sadists, or fraudsters. Their destructive acts tend to recur, and their psychological constitution appears resistant to any attempts at reform.

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[11] "'It was as if something directed me, something outside me, something supernatural. I was absolutely not in control of myself when I committed these murders, when I stabbed people, when I was cruel'. In his confession he repeated such phrases as: 'I was in an animal fever and I remember some of my actions only vaguely. … At the moment of the crime I wanted to tear everything. … I don't know what happened to me … seized by an uncontrollable urge … overwhelmingly drawn … I started to shake. … I was shaking violently. … I literally started to shake …'". Ibid., 238.

[12] Hillman claims that Christian theology refers to this lack as *privatio boni*—lack of goodness; cf. ibid., 234. However, it should be clarified that scholastic philosophy and theology used the term *privatio boni* to refer to the absence of being (evil is the absence of being), not to the absence (however understood) in human nature or soul.

[13] "Something fundamentally human is missing. Your character, your personality inventory has a hole in it. Your crimes are not due so much to the presence of the shadow (since everyone is subject to that universal archetype), but rather to a specific absence, the lack of human feeling. […] Other traits may fill in the absence: impulsiveness (the short fuse), shortsightedness (immediate gratification outweighs long-term consequences), repetitive rigidities, emotional poverty, stunted intellect, imperviousness to guilt and remorse (the Teflon shrug), projection and denial—all these are noted, but principal and more basic is that erotic lacuna, that cold absence, that inability to feel for and into another living creature." Ibid., 234.

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A comprehensive overview of the psyche and behaviour of the psychopath is provided by Robert D. Hare,[14] a leading researcher in the field of psychopathy. The author acknowledges that some people are still sceptical about the existence of psychopaths; however, there are already many documented cases that leave little doubt about the existence of such individuals. Prior to arrest, many cruel psychopaths lived the lives of average, unremarkable citizens who we would never have suspected of being serial killers. They were our relatives, neighbours, or co-workers. It occurs that they all have something in common, namely a recurring and sinister motif present in all psychopathic profiles: such individuals are incapable of caring about the suffering of others, they are characterised by a lack of empathy, and are therefore incapable of feeling love. Hare refers to this as a *defect*, and attempts to explain it through an examination of family background have produced no significant results. Hillman speaks of emptiness (*lacuna*), while Hare refers to a defect or deficiency when discussing the absence of human feeling in the minds of psychopaths. Thus, there is a clearly visible similarity in the assessments of both thinkers.

Hare points out that psychopathy is characterised by a range of behaviours that deviate from social norms, and this is its most distinctive symptom. He refers to psychopaths as "social predators," meaning completely conscienceless egoists who violate socially accepted rules without any sense of guilt or remorse.[15] It is worth noting, however, that unlawful behaviour does not allow us to equate psychopaths with dangerous criminals, since most offenders do not have psychopathic personalities, and many psychopaths neither come into serious conflict with the law nor end up imprisoned. Yet, lacking scruples or a sense of guilt, they harm and destroy others. They remain completely indifferent to the suffering of their victims.

In his book *Without Conscience*, Hare sets out with the intention of making his discussion of psychopathy more accessible than the highly specialised language used in numerous scientific publications. At the same time, he stresses that

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[14] Robert D. Hare, *Psychopaci są wśród nas*, trans. Anna Skucińska [Polish translation of *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us*] (Kraków: Znak, 2006).

[15] Ibid., 9. See also: *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki* [Psychology: An Academic Handbook], ed. Jan Strelau, vol. 3 (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2005), 589.

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the book is firmly grounded in empirical research in cognitive psychophysiology and experimental psychology. He notes that the very term *psychopathy* can be misleading, as it is often taken—especially in media discourse—to mean "mental illness" or to equate the psychopath with a lunatic or an insane person. For this reason, Hare draws a clear distinction between psychotic individuals, who have an impaired grasp of reality, and psychopaths, who remain fully aware of their actions.

Hare argues that there is no clear evidence indicating that psychopaths are mentally ill in the psychiatric sense. This may seem surprising, since serial killers commit acts that appear incomprehensible and horrifying. Yet a diagnosis of psychopathy in cases such as Ted Bundy or Henry Lee Lucas does not imply diminished responsibility; on the contrary, according to contemporary psychiatric standards, it often indicates full awareness and intentionality. This raises an important question: if a serial killer may be legally and clinically sane, what exactly differentiates such a person from an ordinary, mentally healthy individual endowed with empathy and conscience? Hillman explicitly emphasises the absence of human feeling—the emptiness, the *lacuna*.

Without attempting to resolve this issue on empirical grounds, it is worth recalling the intriguing experiment which Hare conducted. Together with a team of researchers, he recorded the electrical activity of the brains of several men performing language tasks, producing electroencephalograms (EEGs). When Hare attempted to publish the results, the submission was rejected. The journal's editor explained, in polite but firm terms, that some of the EEG patterns were so unusual that they seemed inconsistent with what one would expect from "normal" human subjects. Hare later summarised this reaction by noting that most people have encountered individuals who manipulate, deceive, and harm others without remorse—people who may appear charming, but are fundamentally dangerous, and whose defining feature is a profound lack of conscience.

According to Hare, common legal practice and psychiatric criteria indicate that psychopathic murderers are not necessarily insane; on the contrary, their actions are the result of calculated, cold rationality combined with a complete lack of empathy. The cases of well-known psychopathic killers such as Kemper, Berkowitz, and Dahmer—who were judged to be legally sane and fully aware of their actions—together with their fascination with torture, death, and the exercise of power, may encourage researchers to reconsider how mental health is defined.

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From the perspective of an ordinary, morally sensitive person, the motivation of psychopaths remains incomprehensible, provoking both shock and helplessness. Hare cites William March, author of *The Bad Seed*, who makes a similar observation: morally decent people are rarely inclined to suspect radical evil in others and are therefore unable to imagine that someone else might be capable of deeds they themselves could never commit. As a result, they tend to search for mild, non-dramatic explanations for the perpetrator's motivation.[16]

Such considerations were addressed by Harald Welzer, a social psychologist and author of the book *Sprawcy* (*Perpetrators*).[17] A reviewer of the book succinctly formulates the core problem: how is it possible that ordinary men—exemplary fathers and peaceful citizens— are capable of becoming mass killers? Welzer analyses crimes committed by the perpetrators of the Holocaust and other genocides, demonstrating that within only a few weeks killing can become a routine task, carried out as if it were any other form of work. In his study, Welzer emphasises that the vast majority of those involved in mass murder were entirely ordinary individuals who were not psychopaths. After the war, these men displayed no symptoms of mental illness; they were able to rationalise their behaviour and did not perceive their actions as genocide.

Some National Socialist criminals were brought to justice. The public was convinced that the events of the Second World War must have been the work of personalities who were, in some sense, extraordinary, and the idea that mass crimes could have been committed by psychologically normal people seemed absurd. For this reason, the criminals were subjected to detailed psychological testing.[18] In 1946, Douglas Kelley was appointed to lead this initiative.[19] The research methods included a full set of Rorschach tests, numerous additional personality assessments, systematic psychiatric observations, as well as graphological materials and intelligence tests. Following the collection of all the material, it emerged that most of the leading experts refused to develop psychological profiles of the

[16] Ibid., 13, 15, 21, 39–42, 62.

[17] Harald Welzer, *Sprawcy. Dlaczego zwykli ludzie dokonują masowych mordów*, trans. Magdalena Kurkowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2010).

[18] Ibid., 7.

[19] Molly Harrower, "Research Records of the Nazi War Criminals: An Experimental Study After Thirty Years," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 40, no. 4 (1976): 341–342; cited in Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 7.

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criminals, explaining their refusal by invoking a lack of time or unforeseen personal circumstances. In reality, the true reason lay in the dramatic contrast between public expectations and the actual findings. Public opinion anticipated clear evidence of a unique psychopathology, some particularly repugnant personality structure common to Nazi perpetrators. It appeared obvious that such gruesome mass murders must have been committed by mentally disturbed, morally depraved individuals devoid of conscience. Yet nothing of the kind was found. This fact caused considerable anxiety among the experts, who were fearful of announcing the true results of the investigation. The case is intriguing precisely because the material revealed no profound pathology of the kind that had been expected.[20] Only Kelley was able to summon the courage to formulate what he himself described as a "dramatic conclusion": based on the findings, he argued that the perpetrators were neither mentally ill nor exceptional, and that individuals of this kind could be found in every country in the world today.[21]

The unexpected conclusions drawn from the research did not dampen enthusiasm for investigating the psychology of criminals. For example, Adorno's work is notable in this regard,[22] and, preferring psychoanalysis to psychological tests (his essay *Education after Auschwitz*), he advocated long-term psychoanalytic study in order to uncover what might lead someone to become a criminal monster. Welzer assumes that Adorno also failed to demonstrate anything of the sort.[23]

In 1978, Ritzler[24] concluded that "the only distinguishing feature of the defendants was their low potential for empathy", but found nothing clinically significant. In 1980, Kren and Rappoport conducted research on the psychology of SS officers, concluding that the vast majority of SS leadership and rank-and-file sol-

[20] Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 8–9.

[21] Ibid., 9.

[22] Theodor W. Adorno, "Wychowanie po Oświęcimiu," trans. Juliusz Zychowicz, *Znak* 28, no. 3 (1978): 285–361. Original: Theodor W. Adorno, *Kritik. Kleine Schriften zur Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 105–134; cited in Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 9.

[23] Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 9.

[24] Barry A. Ritzler, "The Nuremberg Mind Revisited: A Quantitative Approach to Nazi Rorschachs," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 42, no. 4 (1978): 352; cited in Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 11.

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diers would have easily passed tests required for joining the contemporary American police or army.[25] Witness testimony enabled researchers to determine that at the most, ten percent of SS members could be considered as pathological individuals according to clinical criteria.

As a result of his analyses, Welzer arrives at a grim conclusion: mentally normal people commit mass, gruesome war crimes, and the "tragic ease" (Germaine Tillion) with which common individuals are transformed into murderers and criminals retains its inexplicability. According to the sociologist, this terrifying phenomenon has yet to be adequately explained.[26]

Certain answers to these questions may be found in James Hillman's *A Terrible Love of War*,[27] a book grounded in depth psychology. As to whether his proposals will prove to be satisfactory, or might bring forth a breakthrough in explaining why ordinary people are capable of committing mass murder, will depend largely on one's worldview. In the chapter titled "War is Normal," Hillman points to the futility of numerous studies attempting to analyse the concept of war.[28] He writes: "Individual intellectuals and excellent modern writers, among them Freud, Einstein, Simone Weil, Virginia Woolf, Hannah Arendt, Robert J. Lifton, Susan Griffin, Jonathan Schell, Barbara Tuchman, and Paul Fussell, have brought their intelligence to bear on the nature of war, as have great artists from Goya, not to mention, Brecht."[29] Hillman also refers to Leo Tolstoy, who—in his view—ridiculed the very idea that the causes of war might be uncovered.[30] Tolstoy's thought is summarised as follows:

> Why did millions of people begin killing one another? Who told them to do it? It would seem obvious to each of them that nothing good could come of it—that it would only make things worse for everyone.

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[25] George M. Kren and Leon Rappoport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behavior* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 64, 70; cited in Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 9.

[26] Welzer, *Sprawcy*, 9, 12–13.

[27] James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 4, 10.

[30] Ibid., 7.

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> Why did they do it? Endless retrospective conjectures can be made, and indeed are made, about the causes of this senseless event, but the sheer number of these explanations, and their concurrence in one purpose, only goes to show that the causes were innumerable and that not one of them can rightly be called *the* cause.[31]

For Tolstoy, war was governed by something approximating to a collective force beyond individual human will. Hillman also leans toward this explanation.

Hillman's statement that "war is normal" does not eliminate the pathology of behaviour or the enormity of the destruction. The "normality of war" does not in any way mitigate the unbearable suffering endured by bodies and souls. The fact that atrocities are sanctioned by politics and law is both awe-inspiring and terrifying. The philosopher explains the basis for his claim that "war is normal" by pointing to its constant presence throughout history and its omnipresence across the world. Moreover, for war to take place, it must first be accepted; in other words, there must be people willing to participate in it.

In his reflections, Hillman draws attention to the inhuman dimension of war and offers an interpretation of war crimes committed by ordinary people from the perspective of depth psychology. In his reckoning, war can only be understood through imagination, through a reference to transcendence, whereas secular explanatory models remain helpless. To grasp the essence of war, one must approach it in a transcendent sense. The "inhumanity" of war lies in its autonomy, its mythical nature, its permanence and immortality. War is a "self-replicating" pattern of behaviour, which corresponds to Jung's definition of the archetype as something timeless and omnipresent, endowed with an elemental dynamism that dominates human life.

From Hillman's perspective, war is endowed with a mythical character. Although often presented as hyper-rational, wars are very far from rational; their causes are not to be found in human drives or in the mistakes of individuals. Hillman rejects, among other things, the testosterone hypothesis. Tolstoy likewise argued that none of the proposed causes are truly able to explain war; like Jung and Hillman, he pointed to an indeterminate force that, much like the forces of living beings, can seize control of human action. On the battlefield, this force manifests itself as something transhuman: a "force of madness," rage, and fury that sweeps

[31] Ibid.

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through groups of soldiers, who are overtaken by a delirium of killing and violence. War is thus a time of inhuman behaviour and emotions.[32]

Hillman provides an archetypal understanding of what "inhuman"[33] is. The Greeks used the term *anathanatoi* to mean "immortal". In this context, "inhuman" means "divine." All inexplicable behaviours and actions are, therefore, manifestations of eternal forces. Possible confirmation for this idea is the unpredictability of war, which results from the influence of inhuman, immortal factors.

However, this does not imply any form of justification, nor does it suggest that people are not the actual perpetrators. On the contrary, all acts of war—including criminal acts—are committed by humans, not by extra-terrestrial beings, just ordinary individuals, boys from the neighbourhood; "inhumanity is all too human". War is a conventionalised madness of destruction and killing, an expression of monstrosity and brutality on both the individual and collective level — a relentless, ruthless archetypal pattern of behaviour. The vast majority of soldiers are ordinary people, displaying neither above-average courage nor any inherent disposition to kill.[34]

The mythical perspective leads to the conclusion that war is an inhuman phenomenon, even though it touches only humans, not animals. Warfare may be described as inhuman, yet it remains an organised and methodical human creation. The "inhumanity of war" is therefore integral to human nature; to be human is also to be capable of brutality and soullessness. If this were not the case, there would be no need for the Ten Commandments—the universal prohibitions against lying, cheating, coveting, stealing and killing would be rendered meaningless.

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[32] Ibid., 21–22, 74, 77.

[33] Ibid., 73. "Inhuman" and "inhumanity" in ordinary usage mean cruel, callous, brutal, merciless. "Inhuman" is a normative term that sets standards for what human beings should not do and should not be. "Inhuman acts refer to those below the standards that distinguish human nature from 'subhuman' species, i.e. animals (hence 'inhuman'—beastly, brutal, savage, and the many animal epithets applied to human behaviour that is disapproved of)."

[34] Hillman writes: "For the most part, the soldiers are ordinary people. According to Haig, they show no above-average courage, and Arendt does not describe them as killers." Ibid., 56. He also notes: "Deliberate cruelty is one of three characteristics that compose what John Keegan calls 'the inhuman face of war.' Coercion and impersonalization are the other two." Ibid., 51. (John Keegan, The Face of Battle. New York: Penguin, 1978.)

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According to Hillman, poets and novelists capture the "inhumanity of war" most accurately, because their imagination reaches beyond the realm of empirical facts. Yet even the facts themselves are "naked and terrible" when "inhumanity" is reduced to statistics—"a transfiguration of cold death into cold numbers."[35]

James Hillman's views, which represent an original continuation of Jung's thought, belong to the branch of depth psychology. His reflections on evil in human nature can serve as an interpretative complement to empirical research. In the case of psychopathic personalities, Hillman's and Hare's assessments converge: both describe psychopaths as individuals whose inner structure lacks conscience and empathy. Hillman explicitly uses the term "*devilish being,*" thereby stepping beyond the strictly empirical domain. He firmly argues that human beings may commit evil acts for the sake of evil itself, a claim widely rejected by both the general public and the major currents of philosophical thought. Yet Hare's extensive empirical investigations lead him to a similarly unsettling conclusion: psychopaths are not mentally ill. Rather, they are capable of deliberate, calculated, and coldly rational actions that remain incomprehensible to the average person. In this respect, the insights of these two eminent thinkers can be viewed as complementary.

The second manifestation of evil analysed by Hillman concerns war crimes. War has accompanied humanity from its earliest days. On battlefields, people kill one another in states of frenzy, yet in times of peace the vast majority of them are ordinary, law-abiding, morally responsible individuals. In *A Terrible Love of War*, Hillman attempts to explain how such people can turn so quickly into "bloodthirsty beasts." He approaches the issue from an archetypal perspective, emphasising that the numerous empirical studies devoted to the phenomenon of war contribute surprisingly little to an understanding of its deeper nature. His reflections suggest that violence has a transpersonal dimension which—although it never absolves the perpetrators—may offer insight into why mass atrocities are committed not by clinical psychopaths, but by otherwise decent and conscientious individuals. For some readers, this approach may prove revealing; for others, rather than providing answers it may raise only further questions. Yet it undoubtedly opens up an important path for rethinking the nature of evil in human action.

[35] Ibid., 73.

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Streszczenie

James Hillman o przyczynach zła w ludzkim działaniu

Artykuł podejmuje problem zła w ludzkim działaniu w świetle koncepcji Jamesa Hillmana. Analizie poddano dwa przypadki: czyny osób psychopatycznych oraz masowe zbrodnie popełniane przez zwykłych ludzi w warunkach wojny. Zastosowano metodę interpretacyjną opartą na psychologii głębi, odniesieniach do tradycji filozoficznej (Sokrates, Augustyn, Kant) oraz wynikach współczesnych badań empirycznych (Hare, Welzer). Ustalono, że Hillman podważa utrwalone przekonanie o pochodnym charakterze zła i dopuszcza możliwość jego intencjonalności. Archetypiczne ujęcie przemocy proponowane przez Hillmana stanowi uzupełnienie analiz empirycznych i pozwala lepiej zrozumieć, dlaczego zarówno psychopaci, jak i przeciętni obywatele mogą dopuszczać się skrajnej brutalności.

Słowa kluczowe: James Hillman, zło, psychopatia, zbrodnie wojenne

Zusammenfassung

James Hillman über die Ursachen des Bösen im menschlichen Handeln

Der Artikel befasst sich mit dem Problem des Bösen im menschlichen Handeln im Lichte des Konzeptes von James Hillman. Es wurden zwei Fälle analysiert: die Taten von Psychopathen und Massenverbrechen, die von gewöhnlichen Menschen unter Kriegsbedingungen begangen werden. Es wurde eine interpretative Methode angewendet, die auf der Tiefenpsychologie, Bezügen zur philosophischen Tradition (Sokrates, Augustinus, Kant) und den Ergebnissen zeitgenössischer empirischer Forschungen (Hare, Welzer) basiert. Es wurde festgestellt, dass Hillman die fest verankerte Überzeugung vom abgeleiteten Charakter des Bösen in Frage stellt und die Möglichkeit seiner Intentionalität zulässt. Hillmans archetypische Sichtweise von Gewalt ergänzt empirische Analysen und ermöglicht ein besseres Verständnis dafür, warum sowohl Psychopathen als auch Durchschnittsbürger zu extremer Brutalität fähig sind.

Schlüsselwörter: James Hillman; das Böse; Psychopathie; Kriegsverbrechen

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