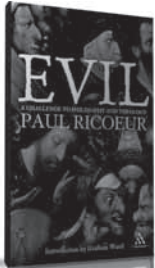


# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
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## ***Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*** Paul Ricoeur

Bloomsbury Academic, 50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK.  
[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com). 2007. 80 pp.  
£16.99 PB. ISBN 9780826494764.

Pierre Gisel's *Preface* (21–30) to Ricoeur's book is dull, unoriginal and redundant. On the other hand, Graham Ward's *Introduction* (3–18) is illuminating:

When Ricoeur enters the theological worldview ... he encounters world of myths and metaphors ... [and Ricoeur] challenges ... theological imagination ... Evil is the excess, the disproportion, within being human that being human cannot fathom ... Just when it seems that all things can be brought together in a grand synthesis, each belonging reciprocally to the other, the question of evil arises like a dark apocalyptic angel disturbing the waters. The angel commands that Ricoeur think again, which perhaps accounts for the exploratory and essayistic character of his writing (10–1).

Ward's is a necessary introduction.

Ricoeur understood the need for understanding myths, as distinct from religions, if we were to begin understanding evil. Here is Ricoeur in his own words:

Myth is certainly the first major transition [in studying evil or theodicy] ... In saying that the world had a beginning, myth relates how the human condition was brought about in its universally wretched form ... The comparative history of religions and cultural anthropology put in place typologies which distribute mythical explanations between monism, dualism, mixed solutions and so on, in order to master this infinite variety. The abstract character of these taxonomies ... must not mask the ambiguities

and paradoxes, often shrewdly calculated, that are cultivated by most myths at the precise moment of explaining the origin of evil. ... These abstract classifications must not mask the great oscillations within the mythical realm itself, between representation bordering down below on legendary narrative and folklore and up above on metaphysical speculation, of the kind that we can see in the great treatises of Hindu thought. Nevertheless, it is through its aspect as folklore that myth contemplates the demonic side of the experience of evil, articulating it in a language' (39–41).

This quotation makes explicit Ricoeur's concern with Hinduism—he speaks both of *monism* and of *the great treatises of Hindu thought*. Therefore, both Ward and Gisel do injustice to Ricoeur by not mentioning even once Ricoeur's acquaintance with Hindu thought. Further, Ricoeur's mention of Hinduism as a religion distinct from other religions calls the bluff of people who continue to write books which make the point that there is no such thing as Hinduism, nor is there anything distinct about the *Sanatana Dharma*. Hinduism is very much a religion, not a mish-mash of myths.

Ricoeur appreciates Immanuel Kant's understanding of evil as inscrutable or *unerforschbar* (53) since one should approach the problem of evil 'with the sobriety of a thought which is always careful not to transgress the limits of knowledge and to preserve the distance between thinking and knowing by object' (53–4). Ricoeur is distinctly Christian when he speaks at length on 'the demonic depth of human freedom' (53). This preoccupation with free will is a recurrent motif within Western philosophy; it began with the Greeks and later was absorbed into the Epistles that St Paul wrote to different nascent Christian Churches. In short, Ricoeur's understanding of evil is not so much mediated by 'Kant, Hegel, Dilthey ... Blondel, Marcel, Bloch and Braudel' (4) as Graham Ward thinks but

is more Pauline than Augustinian. The Pauline nature of Ricoeur's theology and theodicy is evident from the last part of his book. He speaks of the pastoral aspect of suffering and the consequences of evil: 'The failure of the theory of retribution at a speculative level must be integrated into the work of mourning as a deliverance from the accusation which in some way exposes suffering as undeserved. [Ricoeur goes on to refer to rabbi Harold S Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, (New York: Schocken, 1981)] ... A second stage of the spiritualization of lament is to allow oneself outbursts of complaint directed at God' (69).

Ricoeur's thrust is toward the lived experience of being amidst evil and surviving evil; thus his theodicy is very much Pauline.

Neither Ward, nor Gisel mention the influence that Jürgen Moltmann had on Ricoeur. When Moltmann experienced Nazi genocide; he wrote how God suffered with the victims of Hitler's annihilating rage. Ricoeur's 'accusation against "God" is the impatience of hope' (70), which as Ricoeur points out has its origins in the *Psalms* of the Bible (*ibid.*). True theologian that he was, Ricoeur's ending shows his understanding of human nature, of God, of Buddhism and of evil: since 'once violence has been suppressed, the enigma of true suffering, of irreducible suffering, will be laid bare' (72).

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## **The Quintessence of**

## **True Being**

Nome

Society of Abidance in Truth (SAT),  
1834 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA  
95060, USA. [www.satramana.org](http://www.satramana.org). 2011.  
59 pp. \$4.95 PB. ISBN 9780981940946.

In this slim volume, Nome explains the question: 'If the universe is unreal, why is it experienced as if real?' (27). It is the natural corollary to the central tenet of Advaita Vedanta that Brahman alone is real. Nome situates the 'timeless Knowledge' (3) of Advaita Vedanta within the continuum of the Upanishads, Acharya Shankara, the *Ribhu Gita*, and so on. Nome explains the question: 'It may be

wondered, if all are one Self, or Brahman, why are their experiences different and why, when one jiva is liberated from illusion and realizes Brahman, this is not the experience of all of them?' (47).

The Realization of Brahman, the true Self, is liberation from the individual, and need not be considered as a new or different state for or of the individual. The nature of such Liberation, or Realization, being eternal, is ever existent. ... As it is ever-existent, the ideas of loss or attainment of it are inapplicable. (48)

There is nothing other than Brahman. Advaita Vedanta forces us to review epistemology and we will apply it to translation studies and hermeneutics.

Translation requires at least three loci: the translator, the original text, and the target language creation. There is an implied multiplicity involved in the *act* of translation. But if we are to apply Advaita Vedanta to the *act* of translation then we have to rethink this field. Who translates whom or what and into what culture/jiva-aggregate? The differences between languages, linguistic communities, or cultural milieus are illusory to the extent that there are no differences between the translator, the text to be translated, and the text to be created.

The *telos* of philosophical hermeneutics is to find multiplicity within monads, texts, or structures. This is the opposite of what Advaita Vedanta stands for. Advaita Vedanta sees unity within the apparent multiplicity of jivas, objects qua texts. This is because: Any supposed aspect of the jiva [the scholar of hermeneutics, the object or text which is being scrutinised] that bears even the least distinction from Brahman is unreal, for there cannot be another existence apart from the One Existence, regardless of whether such is imagined to be inside, outside, or alongside the One without a second' (37). Thus, Advaita Vedanta demands a rethinking of the entire domain of philosophical hermeneutics. As Nome repeatedly points out, there is no second other than Brahman. Therefore, within Advaita Vedanta, there is no temporal dimension. Nome's books including this one can be used by scholars unacquainted with Advaita Vedanta not only for understanding this philosophy but to review their own stances about other academic disciplines.

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