

Only the mystic really knows the nature of love, even in more ordinary cases of love.

Odysseus: Then is the way to become a philosopher to become a mystic?

Calypso: That is the best way, but we can start from the images and go to the archetypes. Don't you remember how Socrates would teach his disciples that philosophy is the best preparation for death? Now you are dead. Odysseus, you should be preparing our soul for the next step in the afterlife.

Odysseus: So, Calypso, you are still offering me immortality, although a different kind that mere unending life, which you offered me when we met during our lives on earth.

Calypso: Perhaps I am, Odysseus. And this time you cannot say that you have to get home to Ithaka.

Odysseus: You may be right, Calypso, and this time I may take your offer. But since we can no longer die, we have plenty of time to discuss everything thoroughly and come to the best decision. Tell me about your philosophy and I will tell you more about mine. We have all eternity.

NEO-PLATONISM AND EVIL

Odysseus: Hail Calypso! I've been thinking about our last conversation on neo-Platonism, and I'm rather inclined to see if I can follow you in your views about God and the world of ideas. However, I see a difficulty in following you on the neo-Platonic path.

Calypso: Yes, as always your ingenious brain comes up with difficulties. But so long as the difficulties are part of the search for truth, I have no objection to considering them with you. It is only if your difficulties are an attempt to dominate me and win a victory over me that they would be a bad thing. However, raising difficulties is not a bad thing if it is part of the search for truth rather than an attempt to «win» a victory in an argument.

Odysseus: Yes, Socrates impressed in me that philosophy is about the search for truth, not about winning arguments. Perhaps those of us who have passed beyond the Elysian Fields to the next stage of the afterlife, like Plato himself, don't need argument but can *see* the truth. But for us still in these Fields (which some call «Limbo»), we have to use our intellects on the search for truth, raising objections and trying to answer them.

Calypso: Merely raising difficulties without caring for the truth would be an evil thing, but I do not think that that is what you are trying to do, Odysseus. But even if it were, I could bring good out of that evil by using

your difficulties to further understand these things myself. What are your difficulties?

Odysseus: You told me in our last conversation that the basic reality is God, and that God created the world of ideas, and then the material world: the world of ideas depends on God, and the material world depends, in some sense, on the world of ideas.

Calypso: Yes, though followers of Plato differ about whether God created the material world directly or through some intermediary: in one of Plato's stories he is called the «Demiourg» which of course, just means «workman».

Odysseus: But now here is my difficulty: we certainly are aware that there is evil in the world (physical evil like suffering and death, and moral evil such as cruelty and deceit, my experiences at the siege of Troy gave me much experience of both kinds of evil) but perhaps nymphs like you do not have such experiences.

Calypso: Nymphs have their own sorrows and their own temptations. In the world we once lived in, nymphs are immortal, but we have to learn and grow, and circumstances such as falling in love with a mortal who will have to die gave us plenty of suffering. And nymphs may be tempted to use their power to do damage to mortals, as I wanted to keep you on my island and prevent you from getting home to Ithaca and your wife, Penelope.

Odysseus: Then nymphs too know moral evil and physical evil: sin and sorrow. Here is my difficulty: where does evil come from? Is it already present in the world of ideas or in God? If the idea of injustice, for example, is part of the world of ideas, how did it get there, since your kind of neo-Platonism says that the world of ideas are literally ideas in the mind of God. Just as my scheme of the Wooden Horse at Troy was first in my mind, then became a material object. But if evil is in the mind of God, what makes it evil? Some philosophers want to say that God is «beyond good and evil», but I understand that your kind of neo-Platonist wants to say the «good» is another name for God. How then does evil come into being?

Calypso: The answer to that is very simple on one level, though it needs understanding and defending. Evil does not exist; it has no reality.

Odysseus: But surely both sin and suffering exist. Take my Trojan experience; Hecuba's sorrow at the loss of her husband Priam, and the fall of her city was real: real suffering. The cruelty of the men who cast down Hector's son from the battlements of Troy was real: a real moral evil, a real sin.

Calypso: I said that this would need some explanation. First we start off with the idea that God created the worlds from nothing. Before creation there was only God and nothing. After creation there is only God and the actions of God. You notice that in many languages there are two words

for something «evil»: lack of money or poverty, lack of health or illness. By calling these things «poverty» or «illness» we tend to absolutize them, talking as if they exist. But they don't. Poverty is the lack of money or property and illness is the lack of health: they are really lacks of something, and not anything positive.

Odysseus: But surely after creation there are created things.

Calypso: But these created things exist only because of the actions of God; when they act, it is only because God gives them the power to act. In one sense everything is due to the actions of God.

Odysseus: Yes, but you can make a distinction between what God allows to happen and what God would prefer to happen. Humans have free will, and very often we use this free will to do things that God allows, but does not approve of. In fact, I would say that the source of moral evil, sin is just a misuse of free will.

Calypso: But still, everything depends on God: God is absolute, so even after the creation, you might say there is God and nothing. Even the appearance of evil (since evil doesn't really exist) can't exist without God's permission. Now look at evil, it has two parts: guilt and suffering. Sometimes they exist separately, but often they exist together. When we do moral evil we blame ourselves. But what is blaming what? You might say that the part of us that comes from God is blaming another part of us — what some people call the «beast in us». But what I want to say is that this is basically nothing.

Odysseus: That sounds paradoxical.

Calypso: Think of it in this way; we are like a cup in a rainstorm. If we leave the cup upright it will fill with water. If we turn the cup upside down, it cannot be filled with water. But for many of us we hold the cup on its side, so a little water gets in, but not as much as if the cup was more upright.

Odysseus: I see: by the «rainstorm» you mean all the graces, the good things that God wants to give to us. So good persons are ones who let God fill them with good things. Less good persons are ones who only take a part of what God offers them, and a completely evil person would reject all of what God offers them.

Calypso: Yes, so you see the evil person has *nothing*. But no one is really at that extreme: we all take some good things from God. It is a matter of how quickly we turn ourselves «upright» to receive the good things from God. The better people turn to God more quickly, the less good people turn to God more slowly, and the worst people do not turn to God at all, and so they have nothing.

Odysseus: How does this apply to what we ordinarily call sin and suffering?

Calypso: To take your own two examples: Hecuba was suffering because she lacked some things which she wanted: her husband's company and the life of her city. The men who killed Hector's son were trying to get some good things, perhaps safety from future revenge by Hector's son, or a satisfaction of their feelings of frustration after the long siege. But these partial goods were in conflict with greater goods: justice and mercy for example. The child had done them no harm, so it was unjust to punish him. Hector perhaps had done them some harm: killed their comrades in battle. But they should have had mercy on his child.

Odysseus: This sounds a little like what Socrates sometimes said: we choose things only because we see some good in them, but when we make wrong choices we choose a lesser good, not the greater good. But I used to ask him if this meant that if we choose anything other than the highest good, we were doing evil.

Calypso: Some neo-Platonians would say so: if you choose anything less than God, you are doing wrong. But I think that is too strong; there are many good things God wants to give us, and we can sometimes choose a good but not the highest good without doing wrong. It is when we choose a good that *conflicts* with the highest good that we do wrong. If we love our friends and this does not conflict with love of God, that is not doing wrong, but to choose vengeance for the sense of power it gives us — that does conflict with the higher good, and is wrong.

Odysseus: Yes, I see. Socrates was a little too inclined to equate virtue and knowledge: he thought that if we could see what is good we would always choose it. But there is another problem for your view: when we see what is good, how can we choose anything else?

Calypso: Many people see that certain things are good but take them in a wrong way. We see, for example, that God has to be adored and obeyed, so we try to make ourselves into little «god», wanting others to love and obey us. But we are not the center of the universe, God is. Satan's sin and the sin he tempted Adam and Eve with was «to become like God» not in the good sense of being loving and giving, but in the bad sense of wanting to be worshipped and obeyed. There are some people who want to give others good things, but only if the good things come from them and they want to be always thanked profusely for what they give. But many people try to be like God in wanting others to obey them; in their case they want only to take, never to give. They are like a black hole that absorbs everything and gives back nothing. There was a mortal who married one of my sisters: he always wanted gifts, but as soon as a gift was given he lost interest in it, and was looking for the next gift.

Odysseus: Yes, I have known many people like that. Achilles for example, had no real use for many of the gifts that people gave him, but

he wanted them as a sign of approval and when Agamemnon took away Braises from him he was so angry that he sulked in his tent for many days.

Calypso: Yes: you may call this tendency to take and never to give «greed», or you can also call it «pride». It arises from trying to make yourself the center of the universe. However, when we make God the center of the universe, we find that by doing this we can receive all the good things from God: one wise woman once said, «He who has God finds he lacks nothing».

Odysseus: But there is a sort of attractiveness to this attempt to be the center of the universe. Even those who don't quite dare to make themselves the center want to get as close as they can to someone who does dare to put themselves there. This accounts for the attractiveness of certain dictators. Agamemnon, for example, had his toadies, like Palamedes, if they couldn't be the King they would serve the King and be in his counsels.

Calypso: But trying to make yourself the center of the universe, or allying yourself with some other human who thinks he is, is an illusion: it ultimately leads to nothing. Free will is not just about making choices between alternatives, lamb instead of chicken, for example. Every choice ultimately leads either to God or to nothing. That is the real point of freedom to enable us to *choose* God—or to choose nothing. What are your thoughts on all this?

Odysseus: I have two objections—or at least difficulties. One is about reality and the other about morality—I think philosophers nowadays would call the first one a metaphysical objection and the second an ethical objection.

Calypso: Well, what is your metaphysical difficulty?

Odysseus: You seem to want to reduce everything to God or to nothing: two categories. But I want to say that there are three categories: God, created things, and nothing. Created things aren't God, but they aren't nothing either.

Calypso: But created things depend completely on God, not only for their creation, but also to keep them in existence.

Odysseus: Yes, I can agree to that; our existence and our actions depend wholly on God, but again there are two things here: God and what depends on God.

Calypso: Yes, it is rather the way your ideas depend on your mind: if you stop thinking a given idea, and forget it completely, the idea doesn't exist anymore.

Odysseus: But again, my ideas are not me.

Calypso: No, but there is a sense in which they are *part* of you, and in a similar sense, we are all part of God.

Odysseus: I'm not so sure about the analogy here: if we didn't have

any ideas in our mind, we could hardly be said to exist mentally, but God doesn't have to create: if there is no us, God would still exist.

Calypso: Yes, it would be like what your favorite philosopher, Aristotle, calls the difference between an essential property and a non-essential or «accidental» property. Having *some* ideas is an essential property of our minds, but creating things outside of himself is not an essential property of God, in my view. Some neo-Platonists would in fact say that «the One» *has* to create or «emanate», but I agree with the Christian neo-Platonists that creating is a non-essential property of God. Still, I wouldn't necessarily object to your three categories: God, created things, and nothing, so long as we emphasize that created things depend wholly on God, and are in one sense a «part» of God. What is your ethical difficulty?

Odysseus: This is a little harder to state. I can see that evil is often the absence of good, or the misdirection of good. But it seems to me that there are some states of mind, which are simply bad: delighting in cruelty, for example. One of the soldiers who threw Hector's son down to his death was laughing and seemed to be enjoying himself. Surely that kind of delight in cruelty can't be reduced to some kind of misdirection or absence of good.

Calypso: Remember I mentioned briefly that some people make a distinction between the God part of us and the beast part of us. Built into certain predatory beasts is the enjoyment of using their powers to prey on others. When a human being is so far from good, they become like these predatory beasts. But what is natural and innocent in a predatory beast is unnatural and abhorrent in a human being.

Odysseus: Oh yes, I can see that. But how about delight in lying or corrupting other people?

Calypso: Here I think we have to go back to the idea of people trying to make themselves the center of the universe; making themselves little «gods». What God says is always true, so the person who delights in lying is trying to say that whatever he chooses to say is true because he says it. Enjoyment of story telling is not too far from this — you should know; you were a great storyteller, Odysseus.

Odysseus: Yes, and a great liar sometimes. Yes, I can see that a delight in lying and deceiving is a misdirection of the same instincts that make us good storytellers.

Calypso: In the same way, when God tells us to do something, we ought to do it. Enjoying corrupting people is partly enjoyment of making them adopt *your* standards. When you mortals train men for fighting, don't you try to make them obey *your* commands?

Odysseus: Yes, and in that case I have some doubts about this kind of training. My Ithacans didn't regard me as God whose command had to

be obeyed without thinking, as Achilles' Myrmidons regarded him. Like proper Greeks they wanted to have a reason for doing something.

Calypso: I think someone like Achilles would say that in combat people must obey orders without hesitation, and that there is no time for debating the issues in combat. But I agree with your Ithacans. Unless you can see a reason for doing or not doing something, or have absolute trust in the person who commands you, you can easily go astray.

Odysseus: So in effect you are saying that in certain kinds of moral evil we fall below the human level and act like beasts, while in other kinds of moral evil we try to rise above the human level and act like gods. That fits in well with Aristotle's ideas: he makes use of the idea of «the good *for human beings*». Well, perhaps I can follow you into neo-Platonism after all.

Calypso: If following earthly beauty will eventually lead you to appreciate divine beauty, the Plato would be pleased with you.

Odysseus: The person who taught me about philosophy here in the Elysian Fields, Socrates the Athenian, used to talk about a woman named Diotima from whom he learned a great deal.

Calypso: Well, have I answered your difficulties?

Odysseus: Yes, or at least set me on the track to answering them. I owe at least as much to you as Socrates owed to Diotima, and I thank you for discussing this with me.

Calypso: And have I made you a neo-Platonist?

Odysseus: Well, perhaps not completely, but I have more understanding on the neo-Platonist ideas, and more respect for them.

Calypso: Perhaps that is all I can expect of one conversation with you. But as ultimate knowledge belongs to eternity one conversation still leaves us with a lot more time to discuss these topics and find Truth.

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ЭСТЕТИЧЕСКИЙ ДЕМОНИЗМ ОСКАРА УАЙЛЬДА

Эссе

В этом эссе я коснусь вопроса о степени влияния античной мысли и античной культуры в целом на жизнь и творчество великого англо-ирландского поэта, писателя и мыслителя Оскара Фингала О'Флаэрти Уиллса Уайльда (1854–1900).

В наше время кажется очевидным, что многие идеи Древней Греции, образ жизни греков, сам дух греческой мысли не были чужды Оскару Уайльду, со студенческой скамьи впитавшему учения платоников

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