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The Ethics of Cosmic Empathy: Between the Spectrum of Evil and the Stakes of Memory – Tzvetan Todorov as a Model

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***Abstract*—**This academic paper aims to present a philosophical approach to the problem of the relationship between evil and memory and their impact on the possibility of establishing an ethics of universal empathy. This is achieved by tracing the intellectual milestones through which the thought of the French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov evolved, as he moved from purely linguistic studies towards attempts to apply them to issues of political and social life. These issues revolve around the axis of ethical values, particularly the values of good and evil, and the relationship between the Self and the Other amid contemporary geopolitical developments. In this context, the content of memory is used as a tool for imposing influence and control and manufacturing evil, while every horizon for dialogue disappears amid an arrogant perception of the Other and contempt for their existence.
Todorov's contribution therefore presents a socio-philosophical and anthropological project through which he seeks to bring humanity together within the framework of human universality, striving towards a moderate humanism in which human dignity is realised through caring for and supporting the Other, approaching them, and recognising their uniqueness and distinctiveness.

***Keywords*—**Tzvetan Todorov; Ethics; Universality; Evil; Memory.

Introduction

Although the discussion of evil is not a product of contemporary Western philosophy, as philosophers and thinkers have examined it since the dawn of humanity, what is new lies in the way issues related to evil have come to be addressed. Whereas evil was previously associated with mythological, metaphysical, and even supernatural or superstitious dimensions beyond human nature, it has become an integral part of human life and closely connected to the scientific and technological progress experienced by people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This human being is pulled in different directions by numerous ideologies and racial, ethnic, and gender affiliations, among others, making humanity a mixture that can best be described as diverse, fluid, and heterogeneous. Within this mixture lie accumulated traces of time and fragments of bloody and symbolic wars that have scarcely subsided for a long time, forming a memory composed of broken pieces of glass and a kaleidoscope of perspectives and ways of understanding.

All these fragments and scars, both in memory and in the body, are carried by the French philosopher of Bulgarian origin, Tzvetan Todorov (1939–2017), who seeks to restore what remains of them and open up a horizon for shared coexistence that brings together all vulnerable human faces under the umbrella of humanity and in accordance with a universal ethics that recognises the existence of the Other and embraces them.

Accordingly, our topic, entitled The Ethics of Cosmic Empathy: Between the Spectrum of Evil and the Stakes of Memory – Tzvetan Todorov as a Model, leads us to an epistemological and ethical question concerning the following issues: What accounts for the radical transformation in the nature of evil and its mechanisms under totalitarian regimes, despite the growing calls for democracy, freedom, human rights, and all the principles heralded by the Enlightenment? What role do language and social and political discourse play in fuelling the

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inclination towards evil? And what is the value of democratic practice in a world that has succeeded only in distorting memory and closing every horizon for shared coexistence?

1. Language and Evil: From the Poetics of the Text to the Exposure of Mechanisms of Domination

The study of language constituted the central axis of Tzvetan Todorov's thought and philosophy from the outset. He was particularly interested in studying the ideas of the Russian Formalists and introducing their works to Europe and the wider world through translation. During this phase, he sought to establish a scientific theory concerned with the literary study of texts, detached from the influence of external social and cultural contexts and everything that might affect the objective reading of a literary work. However, he soon abandoned his preoccupation with formalist studies and moved towards considering literary, philosophical, and even artistic texts as another manifestation of ideological and political discourse. He thus relinquished the idea that a text is merely a mirror reflecting reality, incapable of going beyond formal ornamentation or a closed structure governed by the strict principle of semantic arbitrariness.

Since human thought is in constant development, Todorov did not remain faithful to Russian Formalist thought, given its rigidity and the social and political circumstances he himself experienced as a contemporary of totalitarian regimes, particularly Nazism and Stalinism. These circumstances led him to recognise the fragility and vulnerability of human beings and to question literature, art, and philosophy in general about the purpose of their existence if they were incapable of approaching the human being as an entity in themselves and of translating the creator's spirit and ideas into a literary work or text in general. For Todorov, language thus became the bridge that enabled him to move from the shadow of the human being, or the semblance of humanity, towards the human being in their authentic reality, free from rigid and rusty rules and constraints that shackle the fragile human condition and its need for the Other in order to feel secure (Tzvetan Todorov, 2014, pp. 12–14).

From this perspective, language, which does not speak by its very nature but merely signifies, drew Todorov's attention to the fact that literary and philosophical texts say more than they explicitly express. As he observes, "Literature is not merely a reflection of a ready-made world; rather, it is an exploration of the possibilities of human existence. To the extent that individuals learn to deconstruct the discourses of texts, they indirectly train themselves to deconstruct the discourses of domination in reality" (Todorov, 1973, p. 18).

Thus, the shift in Todorov's thought from poetics to ethics does not represent an epistemological rupture. Rather, it constitutes an extension of the bridges of communication between purely textual literary and philosophical discourse, embodied in a fabric of words, and the inner and outer worlds of both the creator and the recipient of the literary work. On the other hand, this transition demonstrates that language is expressive and not semantically innocent. The formal correspondence advocated by the Russian Formalists and established by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) as a reference point for linguistic studies is nothing more than an exercise of control and an arbitrary imposition that embodies the violence of discourse while concealing itself behind the justification of objectivity and scientific rigour. In this way, it exercises various forms of political, moral, and social power through its possession of the mechanisms of understanding and its ability to determine truth and meaning.

Language is therefore the primary instrument through which perpetrators and victims are constructed and through which social hierarchies emerge and aversion and exclusion are justified. Todorov addresses the latter in his book The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, demonstrating that it does not remain merely an expression of contempt for the Other but becomes an instrument for provoking panic and terror through the dissemination of hate speech. An example of this is the contempt directed towards Islam and Muslims in the United States and around the world following the events of 11 September. The Other was transformed from a rejected Muslim terrorist into a source of danger that inspires panic. This exchange of roles takes place between the decision-maker—that is, the secular or Christian politician who writes and approves the text—and the Muslim, who becomes both a sinner and a victim as soon as the decision is announced. This illustrates the power of language in performing social acts and reinforces the idea of a clash of civilisations, which Todorov expresses as follows: "It seems clear that the idea of a clash of civilisations exists only in the minds of those who believe in such a clash" (Dani Postel, 2008, n.p.).

Evil, therefore, does not begin with direct physical violence, manifested in starvation, beating, rape, killing, bloodshed, and the infliction of harm upon individuals, their families, and their social and material environments through the destruction of food, drink, and clothing. Rather, it first erodes the epistemological and value systems

that shape human beings and determine their hopes, ideas, and beliefs. Consequently, whoever submits to the system of language necessarily becomes subject to its constraints.

For this reason, totalitarian regimes have turned language into a rigid and effective instrument for achieving their objectives by glorifying the discourse of a single opinion and a single party and rejecting all forms of pluralism and difference. Although, according to Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), "Language is the house of Being" (Martin Heidegger, 1998, p. 117), and constitutes the path through which existence and the being of entities are realised, for Todorov it is an invisible constraint that shackles human beings and deprives them of the ability to see truth in its pure nakedness, far removed from any possible ideology.

There can be no dignified existence without questioning language and reconsidering the authority of discourse, whether religious, philosophical, scientific, political, economic, or otherwise. Such questioning must read between the lines and expose rhetorical manipulation, guiding human beings towards universal values and belief in the superiority of the human soul over everything that might tarnish its primordial innocence. In this way, language regains its human character, and the reified human being returns to their true, natural humanity.

2. The Banality of Evil and Exemplary Memory

In his book The Abuses of Memory (Les Abus de la mémoire), Todorov sheds light on the structure of the camps established under the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. He warns against the exploitation of historical memory to achieve major political objectives through the voluntary mobilisation of followers by disseminating discourses of hatred and aggression. He also calls for moving away from what he terms "literal memory" (Mémoire littérale), which preserves scenes of death, images of victims, and events exactly as they occurred in reality. In other words, it preserves the past with absolute rigidity, as though it were an indestructible cinematic recording that cannot be modified, reread, or reinterpreted.

Literal memory clings to events and continually reproduces and relives them on every occasion, not in order to draw lessons from them or make them a means of exploring the possibilities of shared coexistence, but rather to nourish an enduring spirit of domination and revenge. This, in turn, exhausts the spirit and life of individuals and societies in the pursuit of absolute justice. The victim believes that such justice can only be achieved by preserving the past with all its brutality and violence and by treating it as sacred, thereby preventing the perpetrator from escaping accountability or repeating the crime in the future.

In this way, the demand for justice is transformed from a legitimate claim into a political ideology that, by capitalising on its status as a victim, often seeks to exercise authoritarian power and obtain social and political privileges. Yet, despite its dominance, it overlooks the fact that it has become trapped in trauma and has transmitted that trauma to subsequent generations through memory.

For this reason, Todorov proposes the adoption of "exemplary memory" (Mémoire exemplaire) as a solution for safeguarding human dignity and elevating human existence above everything that might obstruct peaceful coexistence. This form of memory is based on drawing lessons from the past through the use of literal memory. It does not confine itself to the particular event or to "what happened to me"; rather, it opens itself to all the events that have befallen others throughout history, interpreting them in order to learn from them and prevent future tragedies and disasters. Thus, exemplary memory is a form of memory that seeks to anticipate catastrophe by moving beyond the traumas of the past without abolishing or forgetting them. It transforms memory into an energy for resisting evil in accordance with a universal ethics that acknowledges the tragedies experienced by all humanity throughout its history, without privileging the suffering of one people over that of another (Todorov, 1995, pp. 28–33).

On the basis of the foregoing, Todorov draws attention to the fragile dimension of humanity, which has been exhausted by submission to totalitarian systems founded on fanaticism and closure towards the Other. Such closure may have moral justifications and may even be regarded by its adherents as the highest good and as a doctrine. Nevertheless, according to Todorov, it does not fall within the category of demonic evil that is external to human nature and appears in opposition to good within the binary of good and evil. Nor does it arise from the radical evil postulated by Immanuel Kant as part of human nature (Immanuel Kant, 2012, p. 88), nor does it emerge from nothingness as the manifestation of an unknown destructive force.

Rather, it is an evil that infiltrates human projects as an accompanying spectre, including those projects that aspire to achieve human dignity, human rights, justice, absolute equality, and the protection of racial and national purity. These morally pure objectives are precisely what lead to evil when attempts are made to realise them. This

makes evil, particularly in modern societies, increasingly distant from everything described as barbarism and savagery.

Todorov states: "The greatest evil in the modern age does not necessarily originate from supernatural demons, but from ordinary individuals who have abandoned their individual consciousness and surrendered to the power of bureaucracy and silent indifference" (Todorov, 1991, p. 142).

This means that evil does not arise from a barbaric or savage desire for domination, but rather from a blind desire to achieve the good, one that exploits every possible means to fulfil its objectives, regardless of whether those means are illegal or bloody. Consequently, it becomes an institutional and socially exclusionary form of evil founded on ideological, racial, and class-based discrimination. It is driven by a totalitarian doctrine that shapes the understanding of the past and the construction of the present through intelligent officials who have abandoned empathy and responsibility towards the Other in favour of ideology. They have also lost all sense of remorse because they have become mere components of the machinery of war and power.

Todorov states:

"In a totalitarian system, social schizophrenia, that is, the division of life into segments that have no access to one another, becomes a means of defence for those who still retain some moral principles: I behave submissively and abjectly only in this part of my existence, whereas in the other parts, which I consider essential, I remain a person worthy of respect" (Todorov, 1991, Face à l'extrême, p. 139, Paris: Seuil).

This demonstrates that evil does not require individuals devoid of conscience; rather, it requires individuals who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the institutional totalitarian system, even while preserving their conscience at home, in friendship, in love, and in worship, and who may even derive pleasure from power and its privileges.

Todorov has demonstrated the significant role played by surrender and blind obedience to political authority on the part of ordinary individuals who, driven by fervour to safeguard human dignity and preserve national identity, resort to an ideology closely associated at times with literal memory and at other times with indifference in order to perpetrate evil. This has plunged humanity into immense atrocities that are nothing more than expressions of the banality of evil produced by death camps. These camps treated human beings as serial numbers in files or as objects in laboratories, all in the service of feeding the machinery of war under the pretext of pursuing a healthier and better life.

Evil no longer requires psychopathic men or merciless monsters. Instead, it has become an institutional activity distributed among workers and officials who possess a high degree of competence in carrying out their assigned tasks without objection and without necessarily having any feelings of hatred or hostility towards their victims. They are merely mercenaries or killing machines loyal to the system that employs them. As Todorov states: "For evil to occur, the actions of a few individuals are not sufficient; the overwhelming majority must also remain neutral and indifferent, and this is something of which we are all entirely capable" (Todorov, 1995, p. 42).

Todorov's interpretation of the European colonisers' conquest of the Americas was a striking expression of the inferior view adopted towards the indigenous people, the original inhabitants of the land. They were regarded as objects that could be exploited or destroyed without any sense of moral guilt. They were symbolically and psychologically killed before being physically killed through the shedding of blood. They were considered inferior even to the colonisers' animals and the soles of their shoes. They were stripped of their clothes and had their heads forcibly shaved as a means of humiliation. From the moment the colonisers disembarked from their ships, they realised that they were dealing with a people for whom outward appearance constituted a major symbol of identity.

Children were tortured, sanctities were violated, and even the elderly, infants, and the sick were not spared. The sole purpose of this pathological behaviour was to make the host experience death before actual death, while allowing the guest to become the owner of the land and the controller of its inhabitants (Todorov, 1982, pp. 45–52).

For this reason, "We should not simply fight evil in the name of good; rather, we must struggle against the certainties of those who claim that they always know where good and evil lie (...) People who believe themselves to be the embodiment of good possess a distorted vision of the world" (Todorov, 1991, p. 31).

Todorov returns to the act of remembering and its capacity to resist the forgetting of the voices and gazes of the marginalised and rejected, as well as the remains of victims who fell under the oppressive totalitarian system. In order to achieve moral justice for them, we have a duty not to consign them to oblivion in the name of tolerance

and the desire to advance human dignity towards a comprehensive universal dignity. At the same time, we must not turn them into a ladder for attaining power under the pressure of trauma from which the victim has not recovered.

Instead, we must move, in Todorov's view, towards a form of "quiet moral resistance", far removed from grand epics and excessive military and media noise. Such resistance manifests itself in the simple, peaceful realities of everyday life, which are full of genuine acts of minor heroism: offering empathy and consolation during bombardments and on battlefields; hiding a child or a young person pursued by an unjust authority; or sharing a loaf of bread with a hungry person, regardless of their colour or ethnicity.

Todorov states: "True heroism in confronting the hell of the camps did not lie in grand epics, but in simple words, in a shared loaf of bread, and in the human determination to preserve a grain of human compassion" (Todorov, 1991, p. 215).

Todorov thus calls for "Imperfect Humanism", which rejects the arrogance of ideology and technology, acknowledges the fragility of human beings and their need for empathy and support, and recognises the human conscience's capacity to distinguish between good and evil and to say "No" in the face of everyday oppression. It also seeks to preserve the individuality and identity of the Self, rather than embrace the false promises of philosophical and political projects claiming to guarantee humanity's salvation or grant it a utopian perfection that will ultimately lead only to ethnic cleansing and mass graves (Todorov, 2005, pp. 112–118).

3. Ethical Logic and the Discovery of the Other: Between the Shock of Encounter and the Horizon of Universality

Todorov begins his discussion of the relationship with the Other by referring to an old joke which states: "The human being consists of three parts: the soul, the body, and clothing" (Todorov, 2014, p. 102).

Although clothing may be considered something marginal that can be changed on every occasion, it is nevertheless what expresses our identity and human dignity and distinguishes us from others, including animals, peoples, and tribes. Even within the same society, people differ in their choices of clothing. Clothing can therefore become either a reason for approaching the Other or for turning away from them. Although it is merely a piece of fabric, it embodies our personal identity and expresses our ideological, cultural, and moral imprint, as well as our social status.

When we lose the ability to integrate into a community because we wear clothing that is socially inappropriate, or because our clothing reflects poverty and deprivation or indicates illness, we also lose the recognition of the Other and find ourselves relegated to a corner. This resembles the situation of a retired elderly person who gradually loses their rights as they lose the skills and abilities that once distinguished them when they enjoyed full health and strength.

From this perspective, although clothing is existentially incidental, it constitutes the first manifestation of the Self when encountering the Other. Thus:

"The satisfaction that an individual derives from conforming to the standards of the community largely explains the influence of collective feelings and the need to belong to a particular group, a state, or a religious community. Strict adherence to the customs of one's social environment brings the satisfaction associated with the feeling of existing through the community" (Todorov, 2014, p. 105).

Therefore, just as we differ in what we desire and what we dislike, and differ in our bodies in terms of colour, shape, sex, and facial features, even when we share the same style of clothing, this human condition inevitably entails cultural and civilisational differences among people. Such differences encourage communication and mutual understanding with the Other through the universal human language, of which clothing is merely one of many symbols.

The question of the Other occupies an important position in Tzvetan Todorov's philosophy, particularly given that he was Bulgarian, born in Sofia, and migrated to France while his country was under Soviet rule. Although he acquired French citizenship years later, he remained a foreigner and an immigrant who could not disavow his origins or everything that constituted his being. He was also subject to two distinct intellectual systems because he belonged to two different languages, each carrying its own forms of symbolic expression. As he observes, "Rhetorical figures no longer regulate merely the use of speech, but also the other symbolic systems" (Tzvetan Todorov, 1990, p. 18).

He consequently arrived at the conviction that "there is no firmly established universal evil", but only disasters and crimes committed in the name of doing good, such as protecting ourselves from any threat that might come from the Other. This conviction made Todorov faithful to the values of the Enlightenment and led him to devote most of his works to advocating humanism and opposing extremism and racial discrimination.

Others naturally live according to different ways of life, yet they share our humanity. We must therefore focus on what unites us rather than attempt to eliminate the different aspects of our identities by imposing our control over the identity of the Other, which has the inherent right to be different.

4. The Other as a Condition for Self-Discovery: Between Recognition and Human Universality

In his book The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other, Todorov discusses the major failure committed by Christopher Columbus during the conquest of the Americas. Columbus regarded the indigenous inhabitants as objects rather than as human subjects possessing equal value and importance to Europeans. This constitutes the essence of the Western crisis, which lies in its tendency to eliminate otherness, revealing its inability to recognise the Other and accept them as an equal, or even to engage with them in a relationship of reciprocal dialogue.

This tendency was manifested in material colonisation, whereas moral colonisation appeared in the attempt to assimilate the Other while simultaneously eliminating their own identity. Consequently, the European Self suffers from a deficiency that can only be remedied through encountering the Other and opening itself up to them, without dissolving into them or slipping into fanaticism. For Todorov, therefore, the Other is the fundamental condition for the disclosure of the Self (Todorov, 1982, pp. 248–254). Accordingly, understanding reality requires "transforming the Other into another Self, that is, the principle of finding oneself in the Other" (Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle, 1996, p. 200).

Treating the Other as an equal inevitably distances us from compiling a list of millions of victims, orphans, widows, psychologically traumatised individuals, and people with disabilities. Remembering events through our exemplary memory will therefore protect us from sinking into selfishness and hatred and will ensure a balanced life. Todorov states: "The discovery of the Self can only be achieved through the discovery of the Other. In order to know ourselves, we must pass through the mirror of the Other's radical difference without attempting to erase or exclude them" (Todorov, 1982, p. 250).

However, dignity and the effectiveness of exemplary memory do not guarantee the achievement of goodness, as both may coexist in a war criminal or an executioner. As Todorov explains:

"The Chekist (an officer of the Soviet secret police) or the SS officer who kills enemies believes that he is contributing to the good and acting rationally (...) He acts not out of some obscure thirst for evil, but is driven by a sense of duty and an unwavering respect for the law and hierarchy" (Todorov, 2000, pp. 90–91).

He adds: "Not all heroes are worthy of praise" (Todorov, 1991, p. 65).

Thus, in contrast to the morality of heroes, saints, and noble individuals, which is incapable of establishing an ethics of universal empathy that represents humanity as a whole, there must be an ethics of simple everyday life. Such an ethics should be based on preserving human dignity, providing care for the vulnerable without discrimination, and activating the work of thought and memory to examine past events and draw lessons from them. This can only be achieved by acknowledging the difference between the identity of the Self and that of the Other, recognising their equality, and respecting their right to remain different (Todorov, 1982, pp. 185–187).

Todorov states: "The past is not recalled for its own sake, but so that it may tighten the grip on present-day injustice and transform individual or collective suffering into a universal awareness of otherness" (Todorov, 2000, p. 31).

On the basis of the foregoing, the Other is an independent and distinctive subject capable of enriching our existence and making it broader and more expansive. The Other is therefore not an object of socio-colonial knowledge, but rather the different yet participating subject whose presence allows the Self to discover itself. The Self loses its own identity when it refrains from engaging in fair dialogue with the Other and recognising their existence as a unique subject.

For this reason, throughout most of his writings, Todorov expresses his fear that humanity may destroy itself by abandoning the means of peaceful coexistence, including dialogue, dignity, and recognition of the Other's difference. He also warns against attempting to impose democracy by force on the assumption that it represents the ideal political system for all peoples and at all times.

A society is not entirely static; rather, it is in a continuous state of dynamic movement that enables renewal and transformation. Consequently, any form of excessive self-centredness will produce nothing but a new form of savagery and barbarism.

Nevertheless, Todorov does not embrace a pessimistic or nihilistic outlook. Instead, he offers peoples a glimmer of hope for living in a better world, stating:

"If we are the ones who have brought about these problems, then, in principle, we are also capable of finding solutions to them (...). I do not think that we should dream of a world that is ultimately free of its contradictions and internal conflicts. Pursuing such a complete and excessively pure dream is precisely what threatens to make our world even more insane than it is today" (Tzvetan Todorov, 2018, n.p.).

Accordingly, there is only one civilisation: humanity as a whole. No civilisation exists in isolation from another, because the Self, as a fundamental component of civilisation, can neither know nor understand itself except through the Other, who shares with it the ethical recognition of universal existence through respect for all humanity, as though humanity were represented in that person's own being.

Choosing pathological isolation or domination and making the Other feel inferior constitutes nothing less than the collapse of the values of human civilisation and its universal ethical dimensions. Todorov warns against losing these values (Tzvetan Todorov, 2009, p. 84).

Commentary

It may be argued that, although universal ethics, according to the approach presented by Todorov, is an indispensable necessity for preserving the continuity of the human species and protecting it from self-destruction resulting from the exploitation of literal memory as a justification for repression, domination, and violations of human rights, or from using it as a justification for pursuing universal human values, such values may nevertheless become instruments of enslavement and the production of evil under the pressure of a totalitarian outlook.

Despite Todorov's insistence on establishing an equal relationship with the Other, his position conflicts with the approach adopted by Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1996), who begins from a metaphysical concept and principle governing relations with the Other. This principle is based on acknowledging an unconditional and non-reciprocal responsibility towards the Other, which originates within the Self voluntarily and without any restriction or condition. Levinas also considers identity to be fixed in its formation and unrelated to the Other. This is precisely what Todorov challenges, as he regards identity as dynamic and influenced by the relationship between the Self and the Other.

Todorov likewise considers responsibility to be shared and maintains that it cannot be realised without the Other's participation, thereby making equality and social justice possible (Emmanuel Levinas, 1989, p. 290).

We can also identify an opposition to Todorov's determinism on the part of the Marxist current. Elevating individual heroism in confronting the evil of the world involves a considerable disregard for the political and economic structures that govern the world, determine what constitutes good, and manufacture evil. Furthermore, history is written by the strongest. Consequently, relying on the principle of universal ethics and exemplary memory involves considerable exaggeration and neglects the nature of the human Self and its inclination towards evil (Sigmund Freud, 1982, p. 25).

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this study, we arrive at a number of findings, which can be summarised as follows:

- Investigating the question of evil constitutes an inquiry into the very heart of human relations. Linking evil to memory also leads to the question of the relationship with the Other and the issues associated with it, such as recognition, tolerance, hospitality, migration, freedom, human rights, and the foundations of peaceful coexistence.

- Todorov moves away from the formalist and structuralist philosophical approach to language and instead considers language a mediator between human beings and the world and, consequently, between human beings and the Other. In this way, he brings language into society, making it a vehicle for human aspirations and hopes and an expression of people's tragedies and disappointments. Language is thus transformed from a means limited to transmitting information, facilitating communication, and achieving the principle of correspondence between signifier and signified into an active and influential instrument in shaping the social fabric, which is characterised by difference and renewal. Language, in this respect, resembles human society in that it does not merely communicate but also symbolises and conveys more than what the signifier outwardly reveals.

- Todorov's transition from poetics to ethics represents epistemological continuity and the transfer of the findings of linguistic research into the ethical, political, and social fields. It also constitutes a revolt against all philosophies and political systems that use linguistic discourse as a vehicle for conveying truth and meaning in order to control and dominate peoples.

- Todorov demonstrates how politics, particularly during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has brutally exploited the memory of peoples. Instead of directing memory towards the values of tolerance, compassion, and recognition of the Other through exemplary memory, which preserves events only to draw lessons from them and move forward towards constructive social relations aimed at maintaining the possibility of peaceful coexistence, these political systems—particularly Nazism and Stalinism—have directed peoples towards preserving literal memory. This form of memory retains embalmed images of the past so that they can be exploited to mobilise populations in the service of colonial, authoritarian, and expansionist interests.

- The concept of evil to which Todorov draws attention is an evil closely associated with major human projects. It begins with the motivation to achieve the supreme good, the public interest, and morally pure objectives, but subsequently becomes an instrument for imposing authority and domination in the name of nationalism, race, human dignity, and justice. This approach detaches evil from its association with savagery and barbarism. Todorov's position therefore goes beyond previous philosophical approaches to the question of evil, which associated it with mythical and supernatural dimensions and human nature while neglecting the role of language and its impact on memory and social reality.

- According to Todorov, evil has been transformed in the contemporary world, through the division of labour, into a mere component of human practical life. Thus, the murderer is nothing more than an employee carrying out an assigned task within the framework of a general system for which they are prepared to make sacrifices, while simultaneously preserving their conscience, respect for others, friendships, and capacity for love in an ordinary manner.

- For evil to operate, Todorov argues, it requires social complicity, indifference, and the human capacity for reification, rather than feelings of hatred and hostility. He also condemns all voices calling for forgetting in the name of tolerance. In order to live with dignity, according to Todorov, we must acknowledge the mistakes of the past, recognise the Other's right to life and their equality with us, and believe that tragedy has not been confined to a single people or a single historical period.

- Todorov calls for resisting evil through simple actions that create an imperfect humanism, far removed from any ideology that might eliminate the individuality of human beings.

- Todorov demonstrates the role played by clothing and outward appearance in shaping the features of individual and collective identity. He consequently highlights their role in determining the extent to which the Self is willing to establish a relationship with the Other. He also warns against the danger of attempting to abandon one's individual identity in order to integrate with the Other. This makes the recognition of the Other a condition for discovering the Self within the framework of human dignity and through universal ethics.

Finally, it should be noted that our topic, The Ethics of Cosmic Empathy: Between the Spectrum of Evil and the Stakes of Memory – Tzvetan Todorov as a Model, opens up numerous future research perspectives concerning the nature of human relations and their associated ethical values, as well as their relationship with human identity and dignity, particularly in the digital age.

Digital algorithms have become the primary controllers of the formulation of social memory content, while society has been transformed into a consumer and spectacle-oriented society. This has diverted human values into a spiral of literal memory. Moreover, the robot has come to represent an alternative Other alongside the human Other, and machines have frequently replaced human beings. People have also moved away from actual, real-life social relationships towards virtual relationships that are formulated and controlled by digital algorithms.

Furthermore, artificial intelligence has become a controller of the memory, knowledge, and history of peoples, following the decision of numerous companies to destroy original manuscripts and replace them with digital memory. This makes the image Todorov drew of the contemporary situation worthy of prolonged reflection in order to find solutions for safeguarding human dignity and controlling the mechanisms and motivations of evil.

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