

PRIVATIO BONI: EVIL THROUGH THE EYES OF CARL JUNG AND VICTOR WHITE

Abstract: Psychiatrist Carl Jung and Dominican theologian Fr. Victor White engaged in a lengthy dialogue about how evil is understood conceptually. They scrutinised the traditional Western account of evil as a privation of good – privatio boni – from various angles. Jung was polemical in his argument against the concept, while White set out to explain the soundness of privatio boni based on centuries of thought in the Aristotelian/Aquinas tradition. Although consensus was never reached, Jung and White, both pioneers in their own right, have left us a considerable legacy - a template for dialogue on difficult matters of considerable ethical importance.

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Introduction

History provides ample evidence of what human beings are capable of. It tells of battles, wars, murders, rapes, torture and genocide among a litany of evil acts that have been perpetrated down the ages. This fact is not in dispute. But what is less clear is how evil is understood conceptually. The traditional Western philosophical account holds that evil is a privation of good – *malum est privatio boni*. The aim of this paper is to introduce the concept of evil, traditionally understood as a privation of good. In doing so, it expands on some material from an earlier article published by the IJSJ.¹

The context for this consideration is the well-documented dialogue about evil between the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) and the English Dominican theologian Fr. Victor White OP (1902-1960). White's anthropology is grounded in the Aristotelian/Aquinas tradition. The liaison between Carl Jung and Victor White is the main subject of two monographs: *In God's Shadow: the Collaboration of Victor White and C.G. Jung*,² and *Fr. Victor White, O.P.: the Story of Jung's 'White Raven'*.³ Their correspondence is published in *The Jung-White Letters*.⁴ Jung and White spent many years discussing the subject of evil without reaching a consensus. In spite of this, they agreed that the topic most certainly demands concentration and careful consideration. Many of the challenges they faced are still relevant today.

Background and context

To place our subject in context we need to go back in time to ancient Greek philosophy, in particular to the Aristotelian/Aquinas tradition of thought. The work of Aristotle (384-322 BC) had effectively disappeared from scholarship in the West until the eleventh century when there was a substantial translation movement from Arabic into Latin. This made his works

¹ Peter Charleton, 'Carl Jung, Father Victor White and the Book of Job' (2020) 4(2) *Irish Judicial Studies Journal*.

² Ann Conrad Lammers, *In God's Shadow: the Collaboration of Victor White and C.G. Jung* (Paulist Press 1994).

³ Clodagh Weldon, *Fr. Victor White, O.P.: the Story of Jung's 'White Raven'* (University of Scranton Press 2007).

⁴ Ann Conrad Lammers, Adrian Cunningham and Murray Stein (eds), *The Jung-White Letters* (Routledge 2007).

available to Western scholars for the first time. The more significant of whom were St. Albert the Great (1206-1280) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).⁵

In this ancient mode of philosophical thought, all propositions are considered through first principles and an appeal to the universal experience of mankind in an attempt to reach what can reasonably be said to be true. It follows therefore that any conclusions reached must be applicable to all of humanity, irrespective of whether people believe in a deity, and also be able to accommodate the concept of the transcendent without seeking to prove it. The following quotation tells how Aquinas thought about this matter:

Aquinas thought that in any kind of true knowledge, any *scientia*, there must be certain first principles that are simply taken for granted; they are not part of the subject of the *scientia* itself. The statistical study of economics is permeated by the truths of arithmetic but it is not about them. Economics is done *in terms of* arithmetic, it does not seek to establish these truths.⁶

This brief background is relevant because it serves to set the foundation stone of our enquiry. The first principle – that humankind is good – forms the basis of our enquiry into evil understood as a privation of good. Thus, although our consideration is done in terms of this principle, it does not seek to establish this truth.

Against this backdrop any notion that some people are intrinsically evil can be ruled out because it contradicts the first principle that humankind is good. This brings to light another first principle in the Aristotelian/Aquinas tradition of thought – the principle of non-contradiction, a principle that similarly cannot be proven but it does not need to be proven because it is self-evident to reason. It is impossible for the human mind to think coherently about something that contains a contradiction. Thinking about a square circle serves to illustrate this impossibility. Whenever people contradict themselves in their line of thought, they are proved wrong by virtue of the principle of non-contradiction. Thus, being proved wrong is a matter of critical analysis, not of opinion.

The traditional understanding of evil as parasitic on good, or as a privation of good, is in contrast to evil having existence – being – in its own right. The context for this statement is rooted in Aristotle, who discusses the relation between being and truth in Book II of his *Metaphysics* (993b), where he writes that ‘as a thing relates to being, so also to truth’, for being is that which is first known.⁷

Likewise, regarding Aquinas and the teachers and schoolmen of the Middle Ages, McCabe states: ‘for St. Thomas, the meaning of the word ‘evil’ depends on the meaning of ‘good’, and an understanding of this depends, in its turn, upon an understanding of ‘being.’⁸

The significance of the line of thought we are about to consider is that it allows for the possibility of redemption from evil for all human beings, whether believers in God or not.

⁵ For more on the translations of the Greek philosophers from Arabic into Latin and the subsequent collaboration between Christian and Arab see: Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2nd edn, Routledge 2009) 481.

⁶ Herbert McCabe, ‘Aquinas and Good Sense’ (1986) 67 (798) *New Blackfriars* 425. Later published as Herbert McCabe, *God Still Matters* (Continuum 2002) ch 14.

⁷ Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas & Contemplation*, (Oxford University Press 2021) 50.

⁸ Herbert McCabe, *God and Evil in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Continuum 2010) 15. McCabe’s work focused on ‘key areas of Aquinas: the nature of human action and thinking, and the question of how to live well.’ Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas* (Continuum 2008) xii. See also Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life* (Continuum 2005).

We each have the potential to transform our personal wickedness, in whatever form this may manifest, by considering and acting in favour of what is ethical and deemed to be good. 'It (*privatio boni*) offered something more than passive acceptance: the possibility was there of redeeming evil, a dynamic turning of evil into good by supplying the very privations whereby what was fundamentally good had been rendered evil.'⁹

It is this traditional understanding which Jung so strongly criticised in his polemic against *privatio boni*.¹⁰ Jung's interpretation of the concept of evil (as distinct from the fact that evil acts happen) was that good and evil are equivalent opposites – a line of thought that does not hold logically in White's analysis. His analysis also demonstrated that 'no necessary or practical contradiction exists between Jung's psychology and the Catholic (privative) theory of evil,'¹¹ and he went so far as to suggest that 'it (*privatio boni*) has something to be said for it even as a working hypothesis in practical therapy' in providing the philosophical ground for a truly integral human psychology.¹² Jung did not respond to White's suggestion of adopting *privatio boni* as a working hypothesis which would have settled the conceptual contradiction. White was prepared to accept the considerable implications if his analysis was wrong, namely that 'the thought and labour of centuries would crumble to smithereens', but he was equally not eager to 'destroy this ancient heritage until convinced that this is necessary; least of all if he cannot be offered some other satisfactory account.'¹³

Jung's polemic against *privatio boni*

There are three specific works in which Jung undertakes an analysis of the concept of evil as a privation of good – *privatio boni*. These are 1) 'a psychological approach to the dogma of the Trinity' (1942), 2) 'Christ a Symbol of the Self,' Chapter V, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (1951/1959), and 3) *Answer to Job* (1952/1954).¹⁴

In Jung's polemic (his own word) he attempted to deal with the conflict between what he terms metaphysics and observed experience, which he referred to as empirical data. He argued that good and bad are observed as equivalent opposites:

Psychology is an empirical science and deals with realities. As a psychologist, therefore, I have neither the inclination nor the competence to mix myself up with metaphysics. Only, I have to get polemical when metaphysics encroaches on experience and interprets it in a way that is not justified empirically. My criticism of the *privatio boni* holds only so far as psychological experience goes... The *privatio boni* may therefore be a metaphysical truth. I presume no judgement on this matter. I must only insist that in our field of

⁹ Victor White, 'Good and Evil' (1966) 12 *Harvest* 32.

¹⁰ See also Mary Stefanazzi, 'Victor White OP: Defining evil in Jungian-Christian Dialogue' (2019) 11(2) *International Journal of Jungian Studies*.

¹¹ Lammers (n 4) 230n18.

¹² White (n 9) 34.

¹³ White (n 9) 24.

¹⁴ The first date refers to the German edition and the second to the first authorised English translation. Carl G. Jung, 'A psychological approach to the dogma of the Trinity,' in Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion: East and West*, *CW 11* (Princeton University Press 2nd Edition 1969) para 169-295; 'Christ a Symbol of the Self,' Chapter V, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, *CW 9ii* (Princeton University Press 2nd Edition 1969) 68-126; *Answer to Job*, in *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, *CW 11*, (Princeton University Press 2nd Edition 1969) 553-758.

experience white and black, light and dark, good and bad are equivalent opposites which always predicate one another.¹⁵

In the tradition of Western thought, White cannot agree that good and bad are equivalent opposites:¹⁶

Few logicians, ancient or modern, would be prepared to put the pairs of opposites, hot-cold, right-left, up-down, light-dark, good-evil on the same footing. It is a commonplace of logical textbooks that not all opposites are of the same sort. Not all pairs of opposites consist of two positive contraries... There are other opposites which logicians call precisely privative opposites: in these one of the opposites is positive, the other its privation. Standard examples of these are sight-blindness, light-darkness and good-evil.¹⁷

The questions Jung grappled with emerge from the gap between what seem to be irreconcilable differences between what the psychological data indicates and what is held by Christians about evil. White points out that thinking about evil as a privation is not unique to Christians: ‘The Rabbi Maimonides, writing at the end of the 12th century was a champion of *privatio boni* so we must not suppose that is some peculiar prerogative of Christians.’¹⁸ Jung wondered whether denial of evil is encouraged by the Christian symbol of the Trinity because evil is not represented therein:

The Christian answer is that evil is a *privatio boni*. This classic formula robs evil of absolute existence and makes it a shadow that has only a relative existence dependent on light... If, therefore, evil is said to be a mere privation of good, the opposition of good and evil is denied outright. How can one speak of “good” at all if there is no “evil?” There is no getting round the fact that if you allow substantiality to good, you must also allow it to evil. Such a view can hardly be squared with observed reality.¹⁹

Observed reality cannot be relied on to reveal the full story. A person may look in the best of health when they are terminally ill, or look terrible when in the best of health. Some additional objective criterion is required to determine what can reasonably be held to be true. This raises an interesting question about the philosophical basis, if any, for psychological treatment in general. To explore the question is outside the present scope but it is an issue which may be usefully informed by this debate. In contemplating Jung’s stance on observed reality through the lens of his psychology of psychological types, it is informative to consider what White has to say about the disagreement from the perspective of the thinking and feeling function:²⁰

The *privatio boni* is, and only claims to be, the answer to the thinker’s question: what is to be our conception of evil, how are we to think of it. To the perception functions of sensation and intuition, just because they are only perceptions, any judgement or statement about good or evil will be equally

¹⁵ Jung, *Aion* (n 14) 98.

¹⁶ See also Victor White, ‘Kinds of opposites’ in *Studien zur analytischen psychologie C.G. Jung’s festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von C.G. Jung, Band I: ‘Beiträge aus theorie und praxis’* (Rascher Verlag 1955) 141–150.

¹⁷ White (n 9) 27–28.

¹⁸ White (n 9) 20.

¹⁹ Jung, ‘Trinity’ (n 14) 247.

²⁰ C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, CW 6 (Princeton University Press 1921/1971).

pointless and inappropriate. The feeling function might be expected to be more helpful; it is a rational function, a judgement function.²¹

In Jung's typology the feeling function differs from intellectual judgement in that it is solely concerned with the subjective criterion of acceptance or rejection. This is significant in understanding the different perspectives when people discuss the subject of good and evil, or indeed any other matter, as White explains:

If such feeling were all, the question what is good and evil would in the abstract be meaningless. In the concrete the good would be simply what I like, evil what I dislike; I should only have this subjective criterion. Discrimination between what is good and what is evil, independently of my present likes and dislikes, would be impossible... It may be readily allowed that, if feeling were all, the world could only be experienced as two equivalent halves: the things a subject likes and the things it dislikes, the agreeable and the disagreeable... Without disparaging the fundamental role of feeling, and especially in our apprehension of value, it seems that to limit our empirical data to feeling alone is to put us on a very slippery slope, to risk jeopardising all the achievements of specifically human endeavour and to throw us back to the purely animal level.²²

There are many things that we dislike that bring about the good results that we may wish for: labour/childbirth, practice/excellence in all sorts of skills and talents e.g. music, carpentry, physical fitness are but some examples.

Although Jung persisted in contradicting traditional thinking, by insisting that good and evil empirically constitute two halves of total reality, this does not detract from the fact that he was deeply and consistently concerned for the well-being of humanity prior to World War II and in its aftermath if the reality of evil is denied. This constitutes the backdrop of his attempts to highlight the reality of evil. 'Today as never before it is important that human beings should not overlook the danger of the evil lurking within them.'²³ 'Man is a very complicated being, and though he knows a great deal about all sorts of things, he knows very little about himself.'²⁴

Jung was emphatic that it is a moral issue to challenge any sort of denial of evil because, psychologically speaking, to lose consciousness of evil is to strengthen its power:

As long as Evil is a non-being *nobody will take his own shadow seriously*. Hitler and Stalin go on representing a mere "accidental lack of perfection". *The future of mankind very much depends upon recognition of the shadow*. Evil is psychologically speaking – *terribly real*. It is a fatal mistake to diminish its power and reality even merely metaphysically.²⁵

White was grateful to Jung for highlighting the issue of evil in spite of the fact that he questioned the argument that *privatio boni* is the cause of the malaise he speaks of: 'Had Dr.

²¹ White (n 9) 21.

²² White (n 9) 22.

²³ Jung, *Aion*: (n 14) 98.

²⁴ C. G. Jung, 'Crime and the Soul,' *The Symbolic Life, CW 18* (Routledge 1977) 821.

²⁵ Jung's letter to White dated 31st December, 1949. See also Lammers (n 4) 143.

Jung done no more in his astonishingly fertile life than make us aware of this, it would be impossible to be sufficiently indebted to him.²⁶

Investigating the problem of evil in *Aion* Jung struggled with the difficulty of reconciling evil with psychological data which was shaped partly by his debate with White on the topic.²⁷ The problem was heightened for him by recent historical events: ‘One could hardly call the things that have happened, and still happen, in the concentration camps of the dictator states an “accidental lack of perfection” – it would sound like mockery.’²⁸ Jung repeatedly states that the idea of evil as a privation of good contradicts psychological data. He cannot come to terms with the fact that evil is not represented in the Christian symbol of Christ:

There can be no doubt that the original Christian conception of the *imago Dei* embodied in Christ meant an all-embracing totality that even includes the animal side of man. Nevertheless the Christ-symbol lacks wholeness in the modern psychological sense, since it does not include the dark side of things but specifically excludes it in the form of a Luciferian opponent.²⁹

Jung does not suggest that this difficult matter rests there. Quite the contrary, his is but one significant voice in the debate about the problem of evil. Thus, in *Aion* he says: ‘far from being complete, is a mere sketch showing how certain Christian ideas look when observed from the standpoint of psychological experience.’³⁰

After *Aion* was published Jung received numerous questions from patients and others. He realised that he now had ‘the problem of giving a more complete and explicit answer than in *Aion*,’ which he had resisted because he knew ‘a storm would be raised.’³¹ Eventually, he did write a further account of his stance on evil and got around his initial hesitation by writing *Answer to Job* in the format of a personal experience:³²

I did so in the form of describing a personal experience, carried by subjective emotions. I deliberately chose this form because I wanted to avoid the impression that I had any idea of announcing an “eternal truth.” The book (*Answer to Job*) does not pretend to be anything but the voice or question of a single individual who hopes or expects to meet with thoughtfulness in the public.³³

Jung, who was born into a family steeped in religion, pitied his father’s absence of faith and was shocked when, as a child, he first read the Book of Job to discover ‘that Yahweh is unjust, that he is even an evil-doer.’³⁴ Thus *Answer to Job* can be said to have had a long gestation period. It is a short and controversial book. Yet Jung’s note at the beginning, which is intended to help the reader, is often overlooked in discussion about the book. It states:

On account of its somewhat unusual content, my little book requires a short preface. I beg of you, dear reader, not to overlook it... I cannot, therefore, write in a coolly objective manner, but must allow my emotional subjectivity

²⁶ White (n 9) 19.

²⁷ Adrian Cunningham ‘Victor White: A Memoir,’ in Lammers, (n 4) 295, n15.

²⁸ Jung, *Aion* (n 14) 96.

²⁹ Jung, *Aion* (n 14) 74.

³⁰ *ibid* 429.

³¹ Jung, ‘Prefatory note to *Answer to Job*, (n 14) 169-295.

³² C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, (n 14) 553-758.

³³ Jung, ‘Prefatory Note’ to *Answer to Job*, (n 14) 358.

³⁴ Paul Bishop, *Jung’s Answer to Job: A Commentary* (Brunner-Routledge, 2002) 34.

to speak if I want to describe what I feel when I read certain books of the Bible, or when I remember the impressions I have received from the doctrines of our faith. I do not write as a biblical scholar (which I am not), but as a layman and physician who has been privileged to see deeply into the psychic life of many people. What I am expressing is first of all my own personal view, but I know that I also speak in the name of many who have had similar experiences.³⁵

Jung intended *Answer to Job* to be a straightforward application of his thoughts about religion: ‘in tackling the book of Job Jung was situating himself in a distinguished line of eminent commentators on one of the most problematic tests of the Judeo-Christian Bible,’ even though he was explicit in stating that he was no Biblical scholar.³⁶ *Answer to Job* was Jung’s way of addressing the contradiction he perceived in the Western God image:

The questions were motivated by contemporary events: falsehood, injustice, slavery, and mass murder engulfed not only major parts of Europe but continue to prevail in vast areas of the world. What has a benevolent and almighty God to say to these problems? This desperate question asked a thousand times, is the concern of this book.³⁷

The situation is clearly a troubling and emotional one for Jung.³⁸ In the previous quotation he understandably attempts to guess the mind of God. This is a serious error, when viewed from the perspective of traditional thought, which White addressed in his consideration of the fact that God is unknown wherein he states that: ‘although we do not and cannot know *what* God is, we can know *that* he is.’³⁹ It is important to note that whenever we yield to the temptation of guessing God’s thoughts or motives, we are speaking of something about which we can know nothing. Thus, to speak of God in parallel terms as to how we speak about human beings is an error in logic:

The Greeks called this approach apophatic theology – where nothing positive is said about God at all – it consists entirely, not of affirmations but of denials. St Thomas calls it the *via remotionis* or the *via negativa*: the negative way of removing from our statements about God all that he is not. As St Thomas sets it out, it looks like no more than a matter of words and logic. But in its origin it is much more than that, it is a way of the whole soul to reach out to God in his transcendence, and is a way by no means peculiar to Christians.⁴⁰

Answer to Job came after a lengthy period of intellectual theological discussion and argument between Jung and White as was ‘The Unknown God,’ which was written: ‘After Jung told White that his thinking did not sufficiently acknowledge mystery. Two years later, White sent a typescript of “The Unknown God” to Jung, apparently to show him his judgement was

³⁵ Jung, ‘*Lectori Benevolo*’ *Answer to Job* (n 14) para 553, 559.

³⁶ ‘*Answer to Job* proved controversial and cost Jung his friendship with one of his closest intellectual companions, Victor White, yet the work has received relatively little attention and the reason for this comparative neglect is not hard to find: the book is very hard to construe and to make sense of it is even harder.’ Bishop (n 34) 2.

³⁷ Jung, ‘Concerning Answer to Job’ (n 23) 1498a.

³⁸ John Hill, ‘The Changing Images of God,’ in Murray Stein and Raya A. Jones (eds), *Cultures and Identities in Transition: Jungian Perspectives* (Routledge 2010) 161.

³⁹ Victor White, ‘The Unknown God’ in *God the Unknown* (Harvill Press 1952) 18.

⁴⁰ *ibid* 19-20.

unfounded.⁴¹ White sent the article to Jung with his letter of 25.6.1952 describing it as: ‘straight, simplified, thomist theology for a pious Catholic magazine; but I think it might interest you, possibly even surprise you!’⁴²

The publication of *Answer to Job* meant that ‘White’s ambitious project to introduce Jung’s psychology to the Catholic world was shattered.’⁴³ White addressed his concerns about the content in his review of the book.⁴⁴ That the intellectual dispute was never resolved between these two ‘intellectual giants’ draws attention to the fact that:⁴⁵

Religious dialogue cannot be exclusively maintained on a purely intellectual level, but must include personal testimonies, which are often grounded in dreams, fantasies or deep emotional experiences that have an intentional significance beyond the immediacy of the affect.⁴⁶

Jung’s aim was not to protect the reader from violence but to help them be affected by it. The presumption is that unless a person is affected by violence the full effect will not become known:

But he should know, or learn to know, what has affected him, for in this way he transforms the blindness of the violence on the one hand and of the affect on the other into knowledge. For this reason I shall express my affect fearlessly and ruthlessly in what follows, and I shall answer injustice with injustice, that I may learn to know why and to what purpose Job was wounded, and what consequences have grown out of this for Yahweh as well as for man.⁴⁷

In the text of *Answer to Job*, Yahweh, in the Biblical book of Job, is seen to be without consciousness and unreflecting. Jung considers him to be ‘too unconscious to be moral – morality presupposes consciousness,’ this is not to infer that he is evil but because he is everything ‘he must have known all along what would happen’ by creating human beings.⁴⁸ *Answer to Job* was not the root of the problem between Jung and White although at times it certainly appears that way. White had concerns about aspects of Jung’s work as early as December 1940, some months after he began personal Jungian analysis with John Layard. He wondered:

Whether there is not considerable likelihood that Jungians, by going beyond their empirical data and making metaphysical and meta-psychical affirmations which are not necessarily demanded by those data, may lay the foundations for a religion or ersatz-religion which so far from complementing Christianity, may contradict it radically... I am far from suggesting Jung can ‘prove’ Genesis – I’m sure he can’t. But if Jung demands a myth which contradicts in important essentials the Judeo-Christian myth as

⁴¹ Lammers (n 4) 274 n 84.

⁴² Lammers (n 4) 197.

⁴³ Hill (n 38) 160.

⁴⁴ Victor White, ‘Jung on Job,’ (1955) 36(420) *Blackfriars* 52-60.

⁴⁵ Hill (n 38) 156.

⁴⁶ *ibid* 162.

⁴⁷ Jung, *Answer to Job*, (n 14) 562-563.

⁴⁸ *ibid* 574.

well as any conceivable metaphysical conception of Deity, then there are rocks ahead.⁴⁹

With the benefit of hindsight we know that White subsequently dodged plenty of rocks on account of his engagement with Jung's psychology. In addressing Jung's statements about evil publicly, he was likely also directing his comments to his Catholic clerical peers who had many concerns about Jung's work which White went to great lengths to allay, as far as was reasonable and objectively possible. The point at issue is summarised by White in the following statement:

Representing my co-religionists and compatriots, the obstacle most difficult for us to overcome is the feature which the author is so eager to deny is there at all, the philosophical presuppositions and framework. This framework is Jung's uncritical adherence to Kant's epistemology, which has no such authority in Anglo-Saxon or Catholic thought.⁵⁰

In one of White's final letters to Jung referring to the publication of *Answer to Job*, just weeks before his death, he writes:

Once it was published, it surely has to be considered objectively, because I think there can be no doubt whatsoever that it raises very many difficulties and problems for many people besides myself as I said in my review. I wish you could have answered them publicly, whether in the *Journal* or elsewhere. I think these questions cannot be disregarded by anybody who is keen on spreading and continuing the wonderful work you have begun, and which *Antwort* (*Answer to Job*) seems implicitly sometimes to repudiate. I cannot pretend that it is not painful for me that you think I am repudiating your work as a whole, and just at the time when (as I told you) I am in trouble with the Roman authorities for my support of it! ... It may seem to you incredible, and yet I can assure myself that it is precisely the interest of your work and what it can do for humanity that I have at heart.⁵¹

It is possibly best to leave the final words of this outline about good and evil to White:

That we have here at least a verbal polemic is an undeniable, if unfortunate, matter of fact. The reconciling function in this conflict of opposites has not yet, to my knowledge, emerged.⁵² My hope is that we shall all be agreed in welcoming opposites, and consciousness of opposites, however difficult, insoluble and painful they may sometimes appear. Full awareness of the opposites is, I believe, in this case particularly necessary. For I think it is not too much to say that our whole Western culture is based on the supposition that evil is not some positive something, an irreducible and indestructible part of the universe, merely to be 'accepted', but something to be progressively

⁴⁹ Cited from Cunningham's manuscript of VW papers in Adrian Cunningham, 'Victor White, John Layard, and C.G. Jung' (1992) *Harvest* 38 50.

⁵⁰ From White's review of *Answer to Job*, cited in Lammers (n 4) 290 n 37.

⁵¹ Lammers (n 4) 290.

⁵² This particular point is highlighted in a recent publication thus: 'The most important section of Jung's *Psychological Types* was chapter 5, 'The Type Problem in Poetry.' The basic issue discussed was how the problem of opposites could be resolved through the production of the uniting or reconciling symbol.' C. G. Jung, *The Black Books, 1913-1932: Notebooks of Transformation*, edited by Sonu Shamdasani, translated by Martin Liebscher, John Peck and Sonu Shamdasani, (New York: W.W. Norton 2020) 74 [v. I].

overcome, destroyed, and precisely by good... It is on these grounds that I trust that my speech for the opposition, for the 'other side', will not be wholly taken amiss.⁵³

White's initial engagement with Jung

White engaged in a process of intense psychological, theological and intellectual reflection during the Second World War from 1940 to 1945, which influenced his theological work throughout the latter half of his life. The output from this endeavour resulted in a groundbreaking contribution to scholarship on the frontiers of theology and psychology. Although initially the attraction to Jung's work was for personal reasons, he soon found that he could not ignore the theological implications which stemmed from Jung's thought.⁵⁴ In an effort to understand the emerging issues, White attempted a synthesis of Jung's Psychology and Holy Teaching - *Sacra Doctrina* - as understood by Aquinas.⁵⁵ The historical context to the teaching of Aquinas down the ages is complex and would require a separate article to give even a brief outline. However, some reference to this subject area is necessary here to place White's theological position, as distinct from his ecclesiastical position, in its rightful context.

White began his teaching ministry at the Dominican House of Studies, Blackfriars, at St Giles, near the centre of Oxford, England. It was a self-sufficient Dominican *studium* with its own teachers, students, and Dominican personality under the guidance of Bede Jarrett O.P. as Provincial, a man said to be the 'symbol of the Dominican renaissance.'⁵⁶ White taught dogmatic theology, Church history, moral theology and ecclesiastical history and was fortunate that Jarrett's vision for the Oxford house was in harmony with his own ideas.⁵⁷ Jarrett chose professors who believed that Aquinas was best taught, not by instruction manuals, but by engagement with contemporary culture, through 'history art, philosophy, psychology, literature and culture.'⁵⁸ It is important to note that the open and engaging ethos of Blackfriars was not characteristic of the prevailing ecclesiastical culture. At the time, Aquinas was taught from manuals purported to represent his work. Adherence to this method of studying Aquinas was mandatory for all clergy, teachers, preachers and professors in philosophical/theological seminaries. It was enforced by the requirement to swear an oath against modernism.⁵⁹ The requirement to swear this anti-modernist oath presented White with an intense moral conflict throughout his life – he was forever in danger of being accused of modernist thinking and his engagement with Jung's work made him even more suspect.⁶⁰ White held to his personal conviction and studied and taught Aquinas with reference to primary texts. He was unlikely ever to agree that manuals could possibly accurately represent the intricacy and complexity of Aquinas' thought and methodology.

⁵³ White (n 9) 34.

⁵⁴ For some initial references to Jung's extensive work see C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Fontana, 1963/1989); Marilyn Nagy, *Philosophical Issues in the Psychology of C.G. Jung* (Suny Press 1991); Anthony Stevens, *Jung, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 1994); Robert H. Hopcke, *A Guided Tour of The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (Shambala 1999) and Clodagh Weldon and Kelly Bulkeley (eds) *Teaching Jung* (Oxford University Press 2011).

⁵⁵ Victor White, 'Holy Teaching: The Idea of Theology According to St. Thomas Aquinas' *Aquinas Paper No. 33* (Blackfriars Publications 1958).

⁵⁶ Aidan Nichols, *Dominican Gallery: Portrait of a Culture*, (Gracewing 1997) 3, 28.

⁵⁷ Lammers (n 1) 44.

⁵⁸ Weldon (n 2) 11.

⁵⁹ For some context to the anti-modernist oath see Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Blackwell 2007) ch 1, 1-16.

⁶⁰ Cunningham (n 3) 321.

Although White and others at Blackfriars were enthusiastic about changing the way Aquinas was studied, the neo-scholastics were far from convinced. Their confidence that Aquinas could withstand engagement with the modern world was weighted against the fear of what might happen. Such was the anti-modernist general ecclesiastical ethos of the time with which White was in conflict. He was faithful to the great medieval scholastic tradition of which Anselm and Aquinas were a significant part.⁶¹ It is from this tradition that White drew his guiding principles. His impact as a teacher was significant as evidenced in various testimonials by his students. Here is one such declaration from the eminent English theologian Herbert McCabe O.P., whose work has been drawn on in this article:

I owe Aquinas to my teachers, especially the late Victor White O.P. who gave me (and indeed the whole English Dominican province) the reality of Aquinas stripped of the scholastic obfuscations of so much modern 'Thomism.' Victor found fascinating parallels with the anti-dualism and 'materialism' of St. Thomas in the work of modern depth psychology.⁶²

The key point here is that the ancient methodology of the Aristotelian/Aquinas tradition provided White with a template from which to engage with any contemporary issue of importance. Paradoxically, it was precisely this training that enabled him to hold the tension between what may initially be considered as two opposing systems of thought – that of Aquinas and Jung. Thus, the fact that White signed the anti-modernist oath, albeit with great moral conflict, needs to be understood in the context of his particular circumstances. It may be useful to mention here that although Christian thought is characteristically defended on rational grounds, the impression is often incorrectly portrayed that what Catholics hold is a matter of 'faith' and not of reason.⁶³ As a theologian deeply grounded in the Christian theology of Aquinas, White saw enormous potential in Jung's work because, 'Jung's more recent writings have been much concerned with the appalling shadow-problem of modern Western man.'⁶⁴ Jung's concept of the shadow refers to the most accessible aspect of the unconscious and 'to become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.'⁶⁵ White found Jung's work compatible with his understanding of human flourishing in the Aristotelian/Aquinas tradition.⁶⁶ Jung was concerned for the depth of the individual as an intrinsic part of the whole of humanity. An example of the common ground between Jung and Christianity, in White's view, is Jung's attempt to encourage human beings to look deeper than the self-serving ego and to make every effort to deliver the ego from 'unrealistic assumptions of isolated autonomy and supremacy.'⁶⁷

The significance of the findings of Jung's Psychology is such that, in White's analysis, it is untenable for theologians to disregard Jung's work because both are concerned with the same subject matter. Although Aquinas and Jung begin with the same data – 'the actual workings

⁶¹ Victor White, 'Scholasticism,' in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, edited by E. C. Messenger. Pamphlet No. R. 126 (Catholic Truth Society 1934).

⁶² Herbert McCabe, *God Matters*, (Continuum 2005) v.

⁶³ Patrick Hannon, 'No Catholic Need Apply?' (2008) 59 11 *The Furrow* 587.

⁶⁴ Victor White, *Soul and Psyche: An Enquiry into the Relationship of Psychotherapy and Religion* (Harvill Press 1960) 146.

⁶⁵ C. G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, CW 9ii* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959) para 14.

⁶⁶ The term 'human flourishing' is rooted in Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* - which refers to the practice of virtue in the context of living a good life in the ethical sense.

⁶⁷ White (n 64) 197.

of the human psyche,' it is in 'their treatment of the facts that they differ widely.'⁶⁸ Because Jung's work is a practice, rather than a theory, the 'most striking parallels and mutual confirmations' that White found between Jung and Aristotle and Aquinas is that:

Jung's method is a prospective one, as a way to self-knowledge and self-control, as an activation of the ethical function, by no means limited to sickness or neurosis. For Aristotle and Jung equally, the goal is the 'Four-Square Man... As a set goal it is also an ethical postulate, a goal for realization – and that is the characteristic point in Jung's system, that it challenges and leads one to ethical decisions.'⁶⁹

Thus, Jung's psychology, according to White, heralds a return to what is familiar territory for the Christian Church.⁷⁰

Jung and White lived through both World Wars and were likely to have heard many stories of human suffering during those times. Consequently, they shared a great concern and interest in contributing somewhat towards the future narrative of human flourishing. Although grounded in different cultures and disciplines, they were both enthusiastic about the prospect of collaborating on a project aimed at establishing the common ground between psychology and theology, disciplines they mutually respected for the value they contributed to humanity. Jung was very much in favour of religion as a vital component of human health and White was of the view that human wholeness must include integration of the personality.

White's writings on Jung's work

By the time World War II was over, White had contributed significantly to discourse on Jung's psychology. His first published work on the topic in 1942 was based on his lecture to the Guild of Pastoral Psychology entitled 'The Frontiers of Theology and Psychology.'⁷¹ The second was the 1944 *Blackfriars* article 'St Thomas Aquinas and Jung's Psychology.'⁷² The third was a 1945 paper read to the Oxford branch of the Newman Association entitled: 'Psychotherapy and Ethics.'⁷³ These three papers outline White's analysis of Jung's Psychology and set the foundation for his attempt at a synthesis of Jung's thought with Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Sacra Doctrina* as understood by Aquinas. These papers are of particular significance because White enclosed them with his first letter to Jung, dated 3rd August 1945, asking if he (Jung) would be willing to check them for accuracy.⁷⁴ Jung was delighted to receive White's letter. It emerged that he had been seeking to collaborate with a Catholic theologian who understood his work from some time prior to this. In White he found both. In his first comprehensive letter of reply he commends White's academic abilities with the following statement:

Excuse the irreverential pun: You are to me a white raven inasmuch as you are the only theologian I know of who has really understood something of what the problem of psychology in our present world means... You have rendered justice to my empirical and practical standpoint throughout. I

⁶⁸ Victor White, 'St. Thomas Aquinas and Jung's Psychology,' (1944) 25(291) *Blackfriars* 213.

⁶⁹ *ibid* 216.

⁷⁰ *ibid* 56.

⁷¹ Victor White, 'The Frontiers of Theology and Psychology,' *Guild of Pastoral Psychology Lecture No. 19*, (1942). Later published as Victor White, *God and the Unconscious*, (1952) Chapter V.

⁷² White (n 68) 209-219.

⁷³ Victor White, 'Psychotherapy and Ethics' (1945) 26(305) *Blackfriars* 287-300.

⁷⁴ Lammers (n 4) 3.

consider this a very meritorious act since most of my philosophically or theologically minded readers overlook my empiricism completely.⁷⁵

A personal and intellectual friendship ensued, and before long, Jung invited White to visit him at his lakeside retreat, a tower built by Jung on the shore of Lake Zurich at Bollingen in Switzerland.⁷⁶ The liaison between Jung and White can briefly be described as an intense, complex, nourishing and challenging relationship for both of them for different reasons. As such, the collaboration is significant in understanding each of their work.⁷⁷

Published correspondence between Jung and White from 1945 to 1960 allows us to trace the development of the relationship and the eventual impasse which caused a rift between them. White had always understood that he would encounter difficulties with his attempt at a synthesis between theology and psychology. He knew of the differences in thinking between the psychologist and the theologian or philosopher and the consequent difficulties that were likely to emerge.⁷⁸ Yet, he had no reason to believe that whatever difficulties were encountered could not be overcome. Ultimately the relationship was marred by an unforeseen and insurmountable obstacle that would jeopardise White's ambitious project of a synthesis between Aquinas and Jung.⁷⁹ The dilemma centred on how evil is understood conceptually. Despite many long and tedious discussions about evil, a consensus was never achieved. The significance of the impasse is still of considerable ethical importance. The arguments set out in the correspondence do not reveal the full complexity of the dispute about evil which the author has attempted to highlight in this paper.

White's consideration of Jung's psychology gained him some recognition as a pioneer on the frontier of theology and psychology. It is worth noting that this subject area is but one of many that White considered deeply and does not sum up his entire *corpus*. When White is cited, it is generally with reference to his first book, *God and the Unconscious*, to which Jung wrote the foreword.⁸⁰ White's second book, a theological work, *God the Unknown* contains his article 'The Unknown God' which brought to light the traditional apophatic theological method as discussed earlier.⁸¹ The third and final major work by White, *Soul and Psyche*, was written after his impasse with Jung and published shortly before his death in 1960.⁸² It is interesting, in the context of this enquiry, that the last publication in White's name was a posthumously published paper entitled 'Good and Evil' which we have quoted from earlier.⁸³ This was the text of a long lecture delivered to the Analytical Psychology Club in London, on 21st November 1953, chaired by the eminent Jungian Analyst, Michael Fordham (1905-1995). The lecture was later delivered, with some editions, to the Analytical Psychology Club, Los Angeles, in February, 1955 and can be read as testament to White's steadfast

⁷⁵ Letter from Jung to White dated 5th October, 1945; Lammers (n 4) 6, 7.

⁷⁶ White's first visit to Bollingen was in August 1946. 'Among the inner circle of Jung's followers, it was considered a great honour and privilege to be invited to spend time with Jung at Bollingen.' Adrian Cunningham, 'Victor White, A Memoir' in Lammers (n 4) 32 n 24.

⁷⁷ In particular, Jung's *Answer to Job* and White's *Soul and Psyche*. Cunningham suggests that 'I am fairly sure that it was discussion with Victor White that focussed Jung's attention on the *Job* material (all but one of the references in Jung's writings follow his contact with White, and the exception may be a *Collected Works* revision. I also suspect that *Answer to Job* owed something of its genesis to these exchanges.' Adrian Cunningham, 'Victor White, John Layard and C. G. Jung' (1992) 38 *Harvest* 46. Similar sentiments are expressed in Murray Stein, 'The Role of Victor White in C.G. Jung's Writings' *Guild of Pastoral Psychology*, (Oxford: Guild Lecture 285, 2003).

⁷⁸ Victor White, *God and the unconscious: an encounter between psychology and religion* (Harvill Press 1952) viii.

⁷⁹ Lammers (n 4) xxiv.

⁸⁰ White (n 78).

⁸¹ Victor White, *God the Unknown* (Harvill Press 1956).

⁸² White (n 64).

⁸³ White (n 9).

attempts to highlight his concerns about the contradiction between Jungian and Christian thought on the subject of evil.

Different understandings of evil: An ethical dilemma

The essence of White's protracted difficulty with Jung's thinking about evil is rooted in the principle of non-contradiction referred to in our opening paragraphs. White sums up the situation thus:

The viewpoint and method of the theologian and of the empiricist or rational thinker will differ widely; and so may their conclusions. If they should appear to conflict, loyalty to truth will require of each that he should verify and check his own processes and attempt to understand those of the other, and to see where misunderstandings and mistakes may have arisen.⁸⁴

This is what White attempted to do in his dialogue with Jung. As the situation stands, Jungians and Christians appear to still use the word evil in different and contradictory senses. This ethical dilemma, which so exercised White, is captured in his review of *Aion*, which draws particular attention to the matter in question: 'Christians and Jungians can use the word 'evil' in two different senses... the moral aims of each [the 'overcoming of evil by good' (Christian) and the 'integration of evil,' (Jungian)] may appear mutually contradictory, and each may appear quite immoral to the other.'⁸⁵

The issue of *privatio boni* first came to light unexpectedly in the course of Jung's treatment of one particular patient who used the line of thought to justify morally reprehensible behaviour. He describes the situation thus:

I was called upon to treat a patient, a scholarly man with an academic training, who had got involved in all manner of dubious and morally reprehensible practices. He turned out to be a fervent adherent of the *privatio boni*, because it fitted in admirably with his scheme: evil in itself is nothing, a mere shadow, a trifling and fleeting diminution of good, like a cloud passing over the sun.⁸⁶

This patient's definition of *privatio boni* is inaccurate conceptually in describing 'evil as nothing but a mere shadow', yet it serves to illustrate the dilemma that Jung and White laboured over as we have seen. The difficulty may be understood as not about evil *per se* but about different methods of thought and the considerable challenge of defining evil in interdisciplinary dialogue.

Privatio boni: A traditional account of evil

The thinking about evil, as we said at the outset, is based on the first principle that humanity is good. The principle *malum est privatio boni* is not a denial of the evil that humankind is capable of. Quite the contrary: the concept goes to the root of the matter by illuminating how evil in the world can be addressed by each individual taking personal responsibility for each instance of 'falling short' of the goodness that we as human beings are capable of. This thinking is consistent with Jung's challenge to confront the shadow. In understanding *malum est privatio boni*, the distinction between evil suffered – *malum poenae* – and evil done – *malum*

⁸⁴ Victor White (n 78) 68.

⁸⁵ Victor White, 'Review of C.G. Jung's *Aion: researches into the phenomenology of the self*' (1960) 41(478) *Blackfriars* 41.

⁸⁶ Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (n 14) para 457.

culpa – is significant in identifying where the moral evil and consequent culpability lies.⁸⁷ In this context, use of the word evil is in the context of the Latin term *malum* which is explained as follows:

For Aquinas, *malum* (sometimes used as a noun and sometimes used as an adjective) bears a more inclusive sense than "evil" does for us. The Latin word *malum* can be translated by nouns such as "damage," "harm," "hurt," "injury," "misfortune," and "misdeed." And the *De malo* is concerned with all these things as well as with what might more naturally be referred to as "evil" by contemporary speakers of English. It is especially concerned with human wrongdoing, but its scope also extends to other things— such as pain and suffering. Hence we find Aquinas starting the work with a general analysis of what it means to say that anything at all is *malum*, where *malum* signifies any kind of failure or shortcoming, anything we might think of as less than good (Latin: *bonum*). For Aquinas, we are dealing with evil whenever we are faced by whatever can be thought of as a case of *falling short*. For him, there is evil wherever goodness is lacking.⁸⁸

Evil suffered - *malum poenae*

Evil suffered – *malum poenae* – can be understood as a consequence of the material world. "There could not be a material world developing according to its own laws without evil suffered."⁸⁹ To illustrate how evil suffered stands in relationship to good, we look to the natural world to see how it survives. When a bird eats a worm, the harm suffered by the worm is good for the bird. The process continues in this way, as the bird is eaten by the fox, and so on. So, happens the natural cycle of a self-sustaining life. Although the harm done to each species that is eaten may seem desperately cruel and painful to the animal concerned, the same act is a good one for the animal sustained by the process. Thus, evil suffered along the entire food chain is something that is essential for the sustenance of the material world in which we live. It is simply a fact of nature. Given this context, in the material world, evil suffered – *malum poenae* – will always have a natural or scientific explanation.⁹⁰ Critically, some good will always accrue in the context of the evil suffered. As mentioned, the harm suffered by the worm is good for the bird.

Evil done - *malum culpa*

When it comes to *malum culpa*, it should be noted that this is self-inflicted: it is evil done to the agent by the agent. It is not evil suffered in the interest of any good:

Unlike evil suffered, evil done, sin, is not an inevitable concomitant of good in the world. There could not be a material world, developing according to its own laws, without evil suffered but there most certainly could be a material human world without evil done. A world without selfishness and greed and cruelty and domination would obviously be a happier, pleasanter, livelier, more sensuously enjoyable world than the one we have now.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Stefanazzi (n 10).

⁸⁸ Brian Davies, (Ed.), Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil (De malo)* Trans. Richard Regan (Oxford University Press 2003) 14.

⁸⁹ Herbert McCabe, *God matters* (Geoffrey Chapman 1987) 34.

⁹⁰ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and evil* (Oxford University Press 2011) 117.

⁹¹ McCabe (n 89) 34.

With *malum culpae*, Aquinas holds that ‘there is no concomitant good here. There is nothing but a failure to choose what is good’.⁹² The privation that results from *malum culpae* is that the humanity – the human capacity for goodness – of the perpetrator is diminished. They have acted with diminished humanity and the humanity they have diminished is their own. Take, for example, the case of a perpetrator of abuse. By the action of causing harm to another person, they have diminished their own humanity. Consequently, and contrary to what is generally believed, evil done (wickedness or faulty behaviour are other ways to describe it) is moral evil because it harms and diminishes the humanity of the perpetrator, since they are the agent of the evil act:

Moral evil is precisely the corruption of the agent by the agent. There may well be those who think that what makes an action morally wrong is the harm it does to others, and they may be a little surprised that I say that what makes an action morally wrong is the harm it does to the perpetrator. An action may be morally wrong *because* it does harm to others, but what we *mean* by saying that it is morally wrong is that it damages the perpetrator.⁹³

If the criterion for moral evil was based on the harm done to others, many actions would be incorrectly assessed as moral evil, since it is possible to ‘do a great deal of harm to others without doing morally wrong at all’, such as when deadly infections are carried without knowledge.⁹⁴ In this instance, although many may die, nothing morally wrong has been done. In summary, any evil done – *malum culpae* – is in the agent and thus ‘consists in a diminishment of their humanity’, meaning not that ‘acting badly *has* a bad effect on the agent’, but that ‘acting unjustly *is* a bad effect, it *is* a diminishment’, of the agent’s humanity.⁹⁵

At this point it is worth considering human culpability with regard to *malum culpae*. A human act that stems from a profoundly impaired freedom of an agent is not held to be morally culpable: ‘To the extent that voluntariness is lacking, we do not have a fully human act (*actus humanus*) though we have an act produced by a human being (*actus hominis*).’⁹⁶ The theological response to the question of ‘whether the presence of moral evil in the world is compatible with the goodness of God’ declares that *malum culpae* cannot be attributable to God, since ‘in a morally evil act, in evil done there is nothing created there, hence no action of God’.⁹⁷ Aquinas takes evil (both evil suffered and evil done) to be something that can truly be said to exist, though he does not take it to be something having *esse* (being) and, therefore, does not regard it as creatively caused by God.⁹⁸ It is also worth noting that in the tradition of apophatic theology:

Aquinas never claims to understand why God has made a world containing evil. He does not claim to fathom God’s motives in bringing things about as they exactly are. With respect to *malum poenae* his position is nothing other than that of someone who holds that evil suffered must always have a natural scientific explanation. With respect to *malum culpae* he argues that it always comes about as a freely acting agent turns away from certain goods.⁹⁹

⁹² Davies (n 90) 117.

⁹³ McCabe (n 89) 35.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ White (n 64) 158.

⁹⁷ McCabe (n 89) 36.

⁹⁸ Davies (n 90) 77.

⁹⁹ *ibid.* 129.

This understanding of evil in no way under-appreciates the horror of human wickedness, but locates the provenance of the evil done – *malum culpae* – in the fact that the humanity of the perpetrator (understood as a moral agent) is diminished by none other than their own actions.

Conclusion

The stated aim of this paper was to introduce the concept of evil, traditionally understood, as a privation of good – *malum est privatio boni*. By considering the topic through the eyes of Jung and White, the differences between two modes of thought have become apparent. The dialogue is of particular interest because it demonstrates the challenge, the difficulty and the value of rigorous interdisciplinary engagement.

The conflict over evil does not, in the author's estimation, indicate that the collaboration between Jung and White was a failure. Quite the contrary – based on White's view that whenever conclusions appear to conflict, loyalty to truth behoves both parties to reconsider their facts and thought processes in an attempt to see where misunderstandings and mistakes may have arisen. The effectiveness of applying the first principles of thought to the problem at hand illustrates the usefulness of this ancient methodology in highlighting conceptual differences that many not have been identified otherwise. The methodology provides a potentially useful template for contemporary discourse on a whole range of topics.

One lesson that may be learned from the dialogue outlined herein is that whenever a discussion generates more heat than light, it is vital to identify specifically how the topic is defined and where any discrepancies and contradictions may lurk. Jung and White, both pioneers in their own right, have left us a considerable legacy - a template for identifying differences on difficult matters of considerable ethical importance.