

The Idea of Good and Evil in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness through the Philosophical Concepts of Nietzsche and Freud

 Nargiz Ismayilova,  Kanan Aghasiyev

Master of Arts in English Language and Literature, Karabük University

PhD candidate in English Language and Literature, Karabük University

nasmayilova@gmail.com, kaasiyev@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article explores the problem of good and evil in human nature by comparing worldview approaches through historical-philosophical and cultural analysis. It examines the English writer Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* alongside the works of Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche. Despite differences in their worldviews and creative approaches to philosophical inquiry, the study reveals significant parallels in their perspectives on human nature. These thinkers portray humanity as a dual entity, whose essence is shaped not only by social constructs but also by deep, inherent natural and biological components. Furthermore, the social aspects of human nature are not unconditionally positive or good, nor does the natural world inherently embody evil. Instead, the concepts of good and evil are subjective, assigned ethical and axiological significance by individuals.

Introduction

The meaning and significance of any philosophical doctrine, including the philosophical component of the work of great writers, can only be understood by taking into account the peculiarities of a particular period of history. After all, every time has a social and spiritual dimension. The social dimension of an era is constituted by the historical events themselves, and the essence of the spiritual development of a particular historical period is most clearly expressed in various forms of creativity, in particular philosophical. Karl Marx spoke particularly about geniuses, believing that they are “a product of their time, their people, the most subtle, precious and invisible juices of which are concentrated in philosophical ideas” (Marx & Engels, 1955, p. 105). Thus, he regarded geniuses as deeply connected to their historical and cultural context. He believed they are not isolated individuals but rather a culmination of their era and society, absorbing and reflecting its most refined, precious, and intangible qualities, which manifest as philosophical ideas.

The worldview of any outstanding writer necessarily has certain philosophical components, expressed to a greater or lesser degree of clarity. They may be obvious or latent. In the latter case, the identification of philosophical ideas in the works of writers and poets can be a difficult task, the solution of



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which is inevitable semantic loss. The image born in the depths of the poetic soul is difficult to express in the usual philosophical terminology. Very often the intuitive clarity of a concept is obscured by being squeezed into the Procrustean bed of categorical definitions. And only art opens the way for philosophy as a "jolly science", if we recall the characterization of wisdom given by Michel Montaigne and subsequently repeated by Friedrich Nietzsche in the title of his 1882 book *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* ("The Gay Science"). However, even the Provençal troubadours tried to combine in *gai saber*, in their poetic art, the power of wisdom and the trepidation of feeling, because even in philosophy itself, love is the semantic dominant.

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) is a striking phenomenon in the history of not only English, but also world literature as arguably the earliest example of postcolonial literature and example of imperialist colonization (Güven, 2018). A Pole by origin (Bekler, 2023), a native of the Russian Empire, Conrad mastered English only by the age of twenty. And he managed not only to become a brilliant stylist, but also a wise thinker, for he learned to filigree express the most complex and relevant worldview ideas, including philosophical ones, in the language of the great Shakespeare. Behind the adventure plot of his story *Heart of Darkness* lays a powerful philosophical subtext, which even today encourages productive reflection. The novella was written at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, and 1902 is considered the year of publication of the book version. In those years, many believed that the coming 20th century will become an era of peace, progress, unprecedented growth of science. Few people could have foreseen at that time that the coming century would become the era of two world wars and revolutions that would shake the foundations of individual and social existence, which would expose previously unseen problems and force thinkers and writers to take a different look at the problems of human nature and the relationship between social and biological in it, good and evil. And only a few talented thinkers have been able to discern dangerous tendencies in human nature that have been fully realized in the new century.

In this work, we will make an attempt to compare the basic philosophical ideas about good and evil in human nature, which can be isolated from Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, and similar spiritual intentions, which are revealed by a careful comparative reading of some of the works of two such dissimilar thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). To achieve this goal, within the framework of this article, we will set and try to solve the following tasks; 1) to identify common cultural intentions found in Conrad, Nietzsche and Freud, their genesis and cultural and historical roots; 2) compare the views of thinkers on the biosocial nature of man; 3) analyze the ethical views of Conrad, Nietzsche and Freud, their ideas about good and evil in the universe and human nature.

Discussion

At the end of the 19th century in the spiritual space of the era, there was a clear weariness from the rationalism of the previous philosophy. Diverse irrational concepts arose that not only spoke about the power of the human spirit and will, but also sought to expose the whole tragedy of the individual's existence in a world filled with tragedies and injustice. First, we should note a striking similarity that becomes apparent even with the most cursory comparison of Conrad, Nietzsche, and Freud as individuals. Friedrich Nietzsche was not so much a "professional" philosopher as he was a brilliant philologist. His philosophy is sometimes considered the link between traditional classical philosophies and the wisdom of the twentieth century (Pertsev, 2009). Indeed, without Nietzsche, the entire culture of the tumultuous and catastrophic



twentieth century would have been markedly different—perhaps even its history as a whole. Nietzsche did not experience adventures in the wilds of Africa during his life, but he made the slogan of his existence the bold cry: “Live dangerously!” The fate of this man was both extraordinary and tragic. Early talent, a professorship, deteriorating eyesight, syphilis, mental illness, and eventual death—these were the defining external events of his biography. Nietzsche believed it was impossible to completely define a person or give them a final verdict. Every attempt at definition, he argued, puts up artificial, rigid boundaries around the vital essence of real life. In this, he followed the thoughts of his idol Goethe (Tekin, 2023), who believed that any person is so limitless that all attempts to classify them conceptually are deserving of ridicule. Nietzsche hoped that sometime in the future the modern and sad division of mankind into a dull herd, to which most individuals belong, and a small number of Supermen, will disappear. In the future, all people will turn into such perfect people, but Nietzsche, of course, did not set exact dates for this transformation. It is precisely such a Superman (Tekin, 2021a, 2021b) that, according to literary critics, Joseph Conrad showed in his story *Heart of Darkness*. Unfortunately, many motives and plots of Nietzsche's philosophical work were interpreted in a totalitarian way in German national socialism both by A. Hitler in his 1925 programmatic book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) and by A. Rosenberg in the work *The Myth of the 20th Century* (1939), which claims philosophical depth. Carefully reading Conrad's short story, you understand that it shows the influence of such works by Nietzsche as *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872), *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886), *The Anti-Christian* (1895), and *Human, Too Human* (1878). In these programmatic philosophical monologues, full of poetics and passion, Nietzsche furiously attacks Christian morality, considering it the lot of the weak and an unfortunate hindrance to strong-minded individuals.

And the works of the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud were as familiar to Conrad as to any educated person of that era. Freud did not seek to formulate his views into a systematized philosophy, but the excellent literary style of his work, combined with compliance with the “spirit of the times,” brought this practical thinker enormous popularity. As it is known, Freud began with the treatment of hysteria, trying to find the cause of the disease in the patient's past. But the analysis of mental anomalies, the “dark side” of human nature, Freud sometimes did with the skill of a truly great artist, analyzing the work of great thinkers and writers in such works as “Oedipus Rex and Hamlet”, “Michelangelo's Moses”, “Dostoevsky and parricide”. *Totem and Taboo* (1913), where Freud talks a lot about the primitive brutality characteristic of primitive peoples, much recalls the pages of Conrad's short story. Freud writes the following lines:

The cannibalism of primitive peoples has something like this as its highest motivation. By absorbing parts of the body of a person through the act of devouring, they also acquire the properties that this person had. From this follow precautions and dietary restrictions under exceptional conditions. A woman during pregnancy should avoid eating the meat of certain animals, because in this way undesirable properties, such as cowardice, can pass on to the child she raises (Freud, 1999, p. 448).

Similarly, Conrad, in describing the manners and customs of the savages, horrifies the reader with their inhumanity, leading them to thank God for belonging to European civilization. However, everything turns out to be much more complex than it initially seems. Joseph Conrad himself, like most writers, can hardly be classified as a “pure philosopher”. He, of course, was not a “professional” in philosophy. Accordingly, Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky also cannot be considered as such, if only the education



they received is taken into account. But poets and writers create images of heroes reflecting on philosophical problems, encouraging them to productive reflections with their books. If we understand by "professional philosophy" an abstract understanding of reality, expressed in categories, then not a single writer can be called a philosopher. But, in our opinion, this is an overly narrow view of the nature of philosophy. No wonder A.F. Losev wrote that "there is no poet without this or that philosophical outlook. There is the philosophy of Pushkin, there is also the philosophy of Turgenev. But how to get to such a philosophy? How to formulate it?" (Losev, 2000, p. 372).

Ideas, as one may know, are in the air of the epoch itself and philosophy, as a unique form of human culture, possessing the features of science and art, not only generates worldview ideas itself, but also captures them from artistic creativity and transforms them. This process is mutual. For instance, Nietzsche's idea of the "blond beast" has undergone such radical transformations in the culture of the twentieth century that whole volumes can be written only about the "adventures" of this theory of Nietzsche. The "ready-made word" in culture is gradually acquiring features that were not intended by its creators. So many of Nietzsche's images began an individual philosophical and cultural existence.

Joseph Conrad had a genuine interest in philosophy, seeking to synthesize philosophical ideas with his own life experience. If we understand intuition as the ability direct capture and awareness of the truth, then it is inherent in the artists of the word of the Conrad scale and manifests itself in their work. But in any work, there is a mystery that the artist seeks to unravel. He is like a thinker trying to get closer to comprehending the mysteries of being, to understanding the nature of good and evil. Both Nietzsche, and Freud, and Conrad looked for and found good and evil not only in their own souls, but also in the souls of other people. Yes, despite all the differences in the worldview and work of Nietzsche, Freud and Conrad, spiritual parallels between them must and can be found. For modern people who have lost faith in the future, a thoughtful appeal to the work of these so different, but at the same time extremely similar thinkers will not be useful.

Of course, at times it's much easier to just read a book without trying to immerse yourself in the inner demons that the characters have. This is true of Dostoyevsky's voluminous novels, and the same is true of Conrad's short story. In *Heart of Darkness*, the demons themselves plunge into the reader (Lawtoo, 2012). The idea of contrast between white and black, light and darkness, good and evil runs like a red thread through the whole story. White people mine ivory in the heart of black Africa and believe that they are the bearers of civilization for savage cannibals. But the line between savagery and civility is sometimes invisible, and a person who considers himself civilized and cultured does not have time to realize how and at what moment he crosses it. It was about this that the great H. G. Wells, somewhat earlier than Conrad, thought in his novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and published in 1896. Conrad in his novella is preoccupied for the most part with reflections on the extent of evil or the extent of good that he discovers in his heroes. The psychologism and philosophy of the writer's prose are visible to the naked eye when he writes about the mysterious Kurtz in this way: "And his soul was possessed by madness. Abandoned in the wilderness, she looked into herself and - I swear by heaven! - went crazy. I had to - probably as a punishment for my sins - undergo a test and look into his soul myself" (Conrad, 2012, p. 86). The protagonist of the story, during a carefree journey along the Thames and traditional Victorian England reflections on the "white man's burden", tells his comrades the story of his journey into the very depths of Africa in search of the mysterious Mr. Kurtz, who leads the extraction of ivory.



One can have different attitudes towards the concept of the “white man's burden”, which was born in the British Empire in the second half of the 19th century thanks to the great R. Kipling in the era of Queen Victoria. But there are elements of truth in this concept: the British thought that they brought civilization to the assumed-backward and so-called underdeveloped peoples of Africa and Asia. But they did it most often by forceful and by no means Christian methods while demolishing the existed well-developed civilizations. Many subjects of Queen Victoria seriously believed that God was British. This was reflected in the literature and philosophy of the British.

Second half of the 19th century - the era of Nietzsche, the time of the birth of Freud's psychoanalysis. By that time, people were tired of excessive rationalism, of that unbridled cult of reason, which was preached by the French and German enlighteners. A powerful irrational trend was born in world philosophy, which made the words of the great its motto: “Not everything that exists is divided into reason without a trace” (Goethe, 1957, p. 395). It was the majestic image of Goethe that turned out to be significant for irrationalism (Tekin, 2022a). But for Nietzsche and Freud, as well as for the European-educated writer Konrad Goethe, he became a landmark figure, including in terms of understanding the relationship between good and evil in the universe. Goethe believed that good and evil are equal opposite forces in the universe. Goethe believed, like Hegel, that there can be no development without a struggle of opposites (Tekin, 2025). Evil forces a person to fight against it, and in this way a person retains his best qualities and does not dehumanize. The intellectual leaders of the time began to address topics such as racism (Firchow, 2000), horrific and cruel murders, and the plundering of the continent by colonialists, who adopted the guise of a 'superman.' We will not recount the plot of Conrad's story but note that, in his vivid depiction of the horrors and madness faced by those searching for Kurtz, the writer excelled. He skillfully revealed the bestial nature that manifests not only in so-called savages but also in the civilized man. Nietzsche, with all the passion of a prophet, attacked the virtues of civilization in *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886):

Modern taste and virtue weaken and dilute the will; nothing is to such an extent consistent with the time as weakness of the will: therefore, in the ideal of a philosopher, the concept of “greatness” should include precisely willpower, severity and the ability for prolonged determination; on the same basis as the opposite teaching and the ideal of timid, self-sacrificing, meek, disinterested humanity approached an age of opposite character, one that, like the sixteenth century, suffered from the dammed energy of the will, from the ferocious flood and stormy waves of egoism (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 324).

All the advantages of civilization, which a person often takes for granted in the routine and comfort of daily life, suddenly become starkly clear and meaningful when confronted with the raw and primal reality of life among cannibals. It is in such moments of extreme contrast, away from the structured order and sophistication of modern society, that one begins to truly appreciate the benefits of civilization—its laws, comforts, moral frameworks, and cultural achievements. The absence of these elements reveals their significance. Simultaneously, the imperfections and flaws of modern European civilization, which are so easy to dwell upon in times of comfort and critique, seem to pale in comparison. In the face of such a primal existence, they are quickly forgotten or become trivial. This realization resonates deeply in Conrad's reflections, encapsulating his exploration of human nature, morality, and the thin veneer of civility that separates us from the more primitive aspects of existence. It is a confrontation with these extremes that



shapes his conclusions about civilization and its value. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche, with his philosophical insight, sought to inspire humanity toward a metaphorical ideal—a concept that transcends the everyday struggles and contradictions of modern life, urging individuals to strive for greatness and embrace the full spectrum of human potential:

The greatest one, who can be the most lonely, the most secretive, the most unlike everyone else, is a person who stands on the other side of good and evil, the master of his virtues, the owner of a huge reserve of will; this is what should be called greatness: the ability to be distinguished by the same versatility as well as wholeness, the same breath as well as completeness. But I will ask again: is greatness possible today? (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 326).

It is this ideal that Kurtz is trying to live up to, in whose soul the last doubts about his own exclusivity are gradually disappearing. Moreover, Nietzsche in his work *The Anti-Christian: The Curse of Christianity* (1895) put forward a terrible thesis that the falling one must be pushed. And this was written by a man who, in his childhood, was called “little pastor” for his deep faith and excellent knowledge of the Bible. Indeed, Nietzsche was a man of extremes all his short life. The slavish morality of Christianity, according to Nietzsche, destroys everything valuable in a person and prevents the birth of the superman. The goodness of Christianity is a lie, and this religion itself destroys the healthy animal principle in man. Nietzsche often considers man as a biological organism, in the process of its development developing more and more complex adaptations to the surrounding world. Man is primarily a body, and the intellect is a product of the social, necessary for the preservation of the lower and necessary instincts (cf. Tekin, 22b).

In the story *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz tries on the toga of a great man, "standing on the other side of good and evil", but in the process of this flirtatious fitting, he begins to lose everything human. Conrad quite philosophically, combining the skill of generalization and the ability to be specific, writes about savagery, about the predominance of biological and even purely animal in man: “They howled, jumped, made terrible grimaces; but the thought that they were people like you, the thought of your distant relationship with these wild and passionate creatures, brought you to awe” (Conrad, 2012, p. 58). Practically about the same, only in other words, Freud always spoke. The biological component of human nature is an integral part of it. Nietzsche believed that modern man should become a superman, and in his modern incarnation he is more like an animal. Nietzsche, as you know, especially many "hairpins" were released precisely about the Germans. Freud placed at the forefront the biological component of human nature in its sexual incarnation. Although it was the followers of Freud who created Freudianism precisely as a philosophical doctrine.

In his work, Conrad showed how Kurtz is trying to embody and put into practice his own ideas about superman. Freud, in his book *The Psychology of the Masses and the Analysis of the Human Self* (1921), rightly wrote that “the primitive form of human society was a horde dominated by a strong male... The human masses again show us the familiar picture of one omnipotent among a crowd of equal comrades, a picture that is also present in our conception of the primitive horde. At the dawn of human history, he was that superman that Nietzsche expected only from the future” (Freud, 1999, pp. 818-819). Kurtz really makes an impression, if not a superman, but an individual, of course, talented and outstanding. The unusual environment in which he found himself reveals animal instincts in him, sometimes releasing a purely



biological one. Kurtz excels in writing, oratory, politics, music, drawing. For this reason alone, there are the makings of Superman in him - as Nietzsche understood him. But this man fell under the power of the base instincts of his soul, he seemed to get lost in his own psychosis. And this happens by no means because he is a villain, but precisely because he is initially smart and extremely sensitive. The image of Kurtz makes us recall the following reasoning of Nietzsche: "Will is not only a complex of feeling and thinking, but above all, it is also an affect - and, moreover, an effect of a team. What is called "freedom of the will" is in essence a superior affect in relation to the one who must obey: "I am free," he "must obey" - this consciousness is hidden in every will, just like that tension of attention, that direct look, fixing only one thing, that unconditional assessment of the position "now this and nothing else is needed", that inner confidence that obedience will be achieved, and everything that still belongs to the state of the commanding. A person who wants - orders something in himself that obeys or about what he thinks that it obeys" (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 224). Accordingly, in Conrad, Kurtz can analyze the smallest spiritual turns in himself, he can peer into himself and listen to the voice of his own soul. Kurtz has the hypnotic ability to influence his surroundings. The surrounding people praise him in every way: "he is kind", "he has big plans", "he will change everything". The strength of this person's gifts rightfully elevates him above others, and it also makes him lonely. Conrad's conclusion recalls the works of Freud, in which he tries to analyze the psyche of patients suffering from neuroses: "But the wild wilderness noticed him early and severely avenged him for the fanatical invasion. I think she told him in a whisper about himself what he did not know, about which he had no idea until he listened to his loneliness, and this whisper enchanted him and resounded in him with a booming echo, for there was emptiness in his depths" (Conrad, 2012, p. 128).

Writers often make their characters philosophize. In the novella *Heart of Darkness* deep thoughts about human nature, about the essence of good and evil and their relationship in being, are expressed by Marlow, whom Conrad made not only the hero of several works, but also the narrator of stories (Güven, 2013). Apparently, Conrad gave this hero some personality traits, making Marlow a person who is able to understand Kurtz and analyze the underlying causes of his actions and the essence of moral transformation. Marlow is able to understand and appreciate Kurtz precisely because they are similar in many ways. Any European and the British in particular, could well be subjected to the temptations that overpowered Kurtz. Apparently, the narrator himself understands that in a similar - "borderline", to use the language of existentialists - situation, he is not in any way immune from repeating the actions and behavior of a madman who imagines himself to be a Nietzschean "superman".

Until now, genuine interest in Conrad's story is caused by his description of the traditions and habits of the indigenous people of Africa, the aborigines, on the one hand, and the influence of the empire, which introduced new rules to its colonies, on the other. The episode is vividly described when Marlow, who came for his colleague, begins to observe in him - a man with a powerful intellect - a manifestation of primitive instincts. The Wilderness takes brutal revenge on Kurtz for the fanatical intrusion. He begins to lose his human appearance, turning into the likeness of a native deity. Kurtz is a well-read and cultured man, who at one time was the author of several articles in defense of the values of European civilization. But this "cultural layer" turns out to be very weak, superficial, which quickly flies off his soul, exposing its mysterious, terrible bowels. The fate of Kurtz is the outer plan of the story. But Conrad asserts something else in it. What is implied much deeper is a terrible savage who beats his drums furiously when he sees death, who literally boils his blood with cruelty. And such a savage may not necessarily be black. This



savage sits inside us and only waits for the moment when all the social norms accumulated by civilization, all the conventions, all the invented etiquette become unnecessary, and even interfering factors, and these dangers have been actualized in the modern era experienced by mankind, when the pandemic and the threat of a possible nuclear war between civilizations have made the very further existence of “reasonable man” itself debatable.

Ten years after the release of Conrad's story, in April 1912, the giant liner Titanic sank. The surviving passengers later described how quickly, during the disaster, the thin veneer of civilization disappeared from the polished gentlemen, who turned into savages, pushing children and women away from lifeboats in their obsession with saving themselves. In July 1914, the First World War broke out, and for the first time, the extermination of people was organized on a scientific basis. All the dubious achievements of civilization, such as poison gases, were used on a grand scale by some so-called civilized nations against others. During World War II, fellow tribesmen of Kant and Nietzsche conducted horrific medical experiments on humans (Josef Mengele) and created lampshades and gloves from human skin (Ilse Koch).

Conrad puts into the mouth of his character thoughts about how hard it is to drop the entire social husk and become a white demon sitting on a throne surrounded by heads of "rebels". Yes, *Heart of Darkness* sounds incredibly creepy and relevant in our time, especially after two terrible world wars. In general, each work of Conrad has a rather strong psychologism. The writer exposes the hidden corners of the human soul, which to a certain extent is akin to the ideas of not only Nietzsche and Freud, but also existentialists. Any catastrophe or phenomenon acquires a symbolic and philosophical character, be it a ghost, a typhoon or the mysterious darkness of an impenetrable jungle. In the story *Heart of Darkness* the focus of the writer's vision is evil. Evil external (jungle, elements, darkness) becomes evil internal, primitive, at the level of instincts. Starting the description with a hostile river, all these terrible howling natives, the author gradually shifts the focus to Kurtz himself, who is, as it were, a reflection of the hero Marlow, his dark corners of the soul. Not a demon, not a person, a character who subjugates other people to his will. No wonder Freud thought a lot about the "terrible, coercive nature of mass formation" in his work *Psychology of the Masses and the Analysis of the Human* (1921). Here is what Freud writes in this work:

The terrible character of mass formation, manifested in the phenomena of suggestion, can rightly be explained by its origin from the primitive horde. The leader of the mass is still the forefather, to whom everyone is filled with fear, the mass still wants, to be ruled by unlimited power, passionately seeks authority; she craves submission (Freud, 1990, p. 830).

Interestingly, later on, Adolf Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg would argue a lot about the fact that the mass is a woman who, by her very nature, is destined to give herself to a strong man. It seems that between Marlow and Kurtz initially there is a connection, an attraction. As you move deeper into the darkness itself, it becomes more and more crowded, and after the death of the infernal agent - almost mystical. Kurtz is essentially Marlow's anti-double, his innermost being. Sometimes this essence looks frighteningly powerful, capable of subjugating not only the will of a person, but even the elements themselves. At the end of the story, Conrad seems to sum up his reflections on human nature and his thoughts about Kurtz: “Kurtz was a wonderful person. He had something to say. He said it. Since I looked beyond the edge, I



understood the look of his eyes, which did not see the flame of a candle, but contemplated the universe and were sharp enough to see all the hearts that beat in the darkness” (Conrad, 2012, p. 132). It turns out that the meaning of human existence is life itself. Conrad comes to this main conclusion. With the cessation of biological existence, individual existence also ends, but some people acquire a long social existence after physical death, and many acquire social immortality.

After all, Nietzsche also did not deny the philosophy of vitality, the idea of the primacy of life as such. Then A. Schweitzer will call such a pathetic attitude to life "reverence for life." Nietzsche tried to express this in metaphors in his philosophical prose poems. Another thing is that the beautiful image of Superman (the term itself is taken from Goethe's Faust) was misinterpreted, more than once during the turbulent 20th century. José Ortega y Gasset rightly notes: “The discovery of values immanent in life, accomplished by Goethe and Nietzsche was a brilliant foresight of the future, an event of great significance - the discovery of these values, the worldview of an entire era. The era foreseen, heralded by brilliant augurs, has come - this is our era" (Gasset, 1991, p. 467). Freud wrote in his work *Psychology of the Masses and the Analysis of the Human "I"* (1921) about the role of the social in a person: “In essence, only society is what prescribes the norms of his morality to a person, while an individual person, as a rule, from these high requirements somehow lagging behind” (Freud, 1999, p. 782). Similar thoughts can be expressed in the language of fiction, which was done by Joseph Conrad in the story *Heart of Darkness*, in which the “linguistic obscurity respectively reveals Conrad’s critique of colonialism and his concern for humanity from the two different paths” (Liu, Y., & Zhong, Z, 2023, p. 313). Conrad understood, as did Nietzsche and Freud, that sometimes a person is separated from the brutality of his own nature only by a faint touch of so-called civilization. The biological was not evil for Conrad, rather, he believed that it was the vices of sociality that irreversibly deformed human nature. Two sides of the same human nature: Social and biological, as well as good and evil, sometimes do not lend themselves to unambiguous conceptual definitions.

Good and evil coexist closely both in human nature and society, and in all social institutions. Despite the fact that morality is a historical concept, there are certain fundamental ethical constants, violating which a person ceases to be a person. The line between civilization and savagery is very thin, sometimes it is generally ephemeral. If in the past twentieth century citizens of civilized countries were often “liberated from the chimera of conscience” (words attributed to Adolf Hitler), then what can we say about uncivilized countries, far from European culture? A European and a black cannibal understand the word "humanism" differently. For a thinking European and for a cannibal in the tropical Congo, it is just a tasty dish on the menu.

However, for nature itself is neither good nor evil. A tsunami or a volcanic eruption is considered evil only through the prism of human perception. But man has learned to partially use the power of nature and the laws of its existence to the detriment of his own kind. And if in the 21st century a new natural science arises, free from the mistakes of the past, then it must necessarily be ethically oriented. Without moral support and an axiological compass, humanity will inevitably perish. Nature itself is the greatest value given to man, and therefore its knowledge must be truly humanistic. Man is not the king of nature, but only a thinking instrument created by nature itself for self-knowledge, and if this tool breaks down (say, if a reasonable anthropic principle turns into megalomania), then the consequences can be irreversible. Let's hope that modern natural scientists have enough reasons and reasons not to allow this. The spiritual



intentions expressed in their creations by such dissimilar people as Conrad, Nietzsche, and Freud were similar in many ways. The commonality of historical time has affected. Good and evil, the nature of a wild beast and unprecedented upsurges of the spirit are combined in a person. Yes, the film of civilization on the surface of the social sea is very thin, so a person sometimes has to make tremendous efforts not to turn into an animal. Evil has many faces and civilization should be inside, not outside of man.

Conclusion

Thus, this work has shown that, despite the difference in worldview and the variety of creative approaches to solving philosophical problems, the views of these thinkers on human nature largely coincided. They proceeded from the idea of a person as a dual being, the deep essence of which is determined not only by the introduced social, but also by deep natural, biological components. Moreover, the social in human nature by no means something affirmatively positive, and the world of nature does not at all introduce an evil principle into human essence. There is no evil or good in the natural world. Axiological, value coloring to this or that phenomenon is always given by the person himself. It was the work of such writers as Joseph Conrad, and such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, who possessed excellent literary talent, that at the dawn of the coming twentieth century provided new, truly prophetic, guidelines for a more sober understanding of human nature, devoid of enlightenment illusions. It seems that although Joseph Conrad, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud deprived philosophy of Enlightenment illusions in many ways, they allowed a more objective look at good and evil in human nature.

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